

Chapter 09

Wildland Fire Management Planning

The Service Fire Management Handbook incorporates, by reference, all guidance in the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#) (Redbook, NFES #2724) Chapter 09 in addition to the Service specific clarifications that follow.

Wildland fire management planning within the Service is a complex activity incorporating interagency fire management obligations and coordination at local, regional and national levels, the mission of the Service and the National Wildlife Refuge System, and local Refuge management. It occurs within the overall National Wildlife Refuge System and National Fish Hatchery planning process. The fire planning process is much more efficient and effective if the requisite land/resource management plans, such as Comprehensive Conservation Plans (CCP) for refuges and fish hatcheries, have been completed and approved.

This chapter is intended to enhance the capability of Agency Administrators, Fire Management Officers (FMO), and other fire and Service personnel to develop, review, and update Fire Management Plans (FMP) that provide for safe, effective and efficient actions during wildfires, prescribed fires, non-fire hazard fuel reduction operations, and other related operations. An outline of responsibilities at local, regional, and national levels is included.

Authorities for Wildland Fire Management

There is a list of Acts and other mandates that provide the authority for managing wildland fires on Service lands, on lands where wildfire is threatening Service lands and on adjacent lands. This information can be found in the Authorities for Wildfire Response on [SharePoint](#).

Planning Responsibilities

Local Fire Management Planning Responsibilities

The primary accountability for the development and content of an FMP, and the compliance needed for its implementation, rests with the unit Agency Administrator. During the development of an FMP, the Administrator depends on the local expertise of the FMO and fire staff, wildlife biologists, cultural resource specialists, and other local staff to ensure complete and appropriate content as well as compliance with federal, state, and local laws, requirements, and regulations. The annual FMP update policy is implemented and approved at the local level by the unit Agency Administrator in conjunction with the unit FMO. Implementation plans described in the FMP, such as prescribed fire plans, are developed at the local level.

When the unit CCP is revised, the FMP must also be revised in the same planning effort and timeframe. This FMP revision requires regional level approval.

Regional Fire Management Planning Responsibilities

Regional Office fire management personnel are responsible for coordinating unit, interagency and geographic area fire management planning efforts within their Region. In addition, they are required to establish a formal FMP review and approval process with regional subject matter experts for the revised FMP that was developed along with the CCP. This will include

1 identifying staff to provide biological, technical, fiscal and policy reviews of the FMPs. The
2 reviewing staff should be provided with parameters of the review upfront to help expedite the
3 process. The Regional Fire Management Coordinator (RFMC), the Regional Refuge Chief,
4 and their staffs are generally involved as well. A Regional Director, or their designee, must
5 approve all FMPs.

6 RFMCs will determine if preparedness plans are needed at the refuge/unit level or if those
7 plans developed by respective Geographic Area Coordination Centers provide adequate
8 guidance.

9 **National Fire Management Planning Responsibilities**

10 The Service Director and the Chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System are responsible for
11 related policy and for ensuring that FMPs are current. Development of policy and oversight of
12 wildland fire planning is delegated to the NWRs Branch of Fire Management in the Division
13 of Natural Resources and Planning. The Branch Chief and staff are co-located with other
14 federal Fire Directors at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.

15
16 Service Fire Management Branch Staff develop and update Service guidance for use with the
17 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework. (See Fishnet - [Fire Management SharePoint](#) –
18 under Fire Management Plan Resources folder). They track the status of FMPs in a
19 SharePoint database for periodic reports to the Department or Congress.

20
21 NIFC fire staff review and propose updates to the Service Manual and the Service Fire
22 Management Handbook. They participate as members of interagency committees and work
23 groups under the umbrella of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) which
24 sponsors development and publication of standard training courses and position certification
25 checklists, Interagency Handbooks and Guides such as the *[Fireline Handbook 410-1](#)*, *[The](#)*
26 *[Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide](#)*, and other
27 similar products.

28
29 The NIFC fire staff plays a key Service role in development and execution of budgets for the
30 Wildland Fire Management Programs. The Wildland Fire Management budget is managed as
31 a set of discrete funds within the Department of Interior and has separate Congressional
32 appropriations from other Service functions. The NIFC fire staff relies on wildfire occurrence
33 data reports and prescribed fire and hazardous fuels project implementation planning to
34 develop and allocate budgets. This process is accomplished with the oversight and
35 involvement of the National Fire Leadership Team (NFLT), which is a formal working group
36 chartered by the Regional Refuge Chiefs. Executive membership of the team includes Service
37 Regional Fire Management Coordinators (RFMCs) from Regions 1-8 and the Fire
38 Management Branch's (FMB) Chief and Deputy Chief.

40 **Wildland Fire Terminology used in Fire Management Plans**

41
42 The source of the terms and definitions in this chapter is the National Wildfire Coordinating
43 Group (NWCG) [Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology](#), which represents federal, state, and
44 local firefighting agencies and departments nation-wide. These definitions can change as
45 wildland fire management policies change. For clarification of terms in this chapter and for

the latest terms and definitions which may have changed since the update of this chapter, access the NWCG web site.

Fire Management Plan Requirements

The Branch of Fire Management has, through a risk based analysis, has reviewed and adjusted the requirements for fire management planning according to fire occurrence and prescribed fire activity and consistent with the preparedness categories approved by the National Fire Leadership Team. The following table introduces the FMP requirements for those categories:

Risk Category	Criteria			Requirements		
	Historic Wildfire Occurrence	Vegetative Description	Wildfire Management Objective and Response	FMP - Text or Spatial	NEPA	Review
Exempt	No Wildfires due to the lack of burnable vegetation	No burnable veg	None	None	None	None
Low	10 year average less than 2 wildfires per year	Has burnable Vegetation and wildfire potential May have a desire to use fire for habitat maintenance or defensible space treatments.	Wildfire response is for suppression only or Wildfire response is for suppression only and fuels treatments are done for habitat maintenance or restoration and/or defensible space management only	Use Wildfire Response Plan if full suppression is the only management option or Scalable FMP as per new DOI FMP Framework covering both full suppression only units with proposed treatments	EA or EIS	Annual Review required FMP revision tied to the revision of CCPs or change in fire management direction
Moderate /High	Category 2 10 year average greater than 2 wildfires per year	Has burnable vegetation and wildfire potential Fuels treatments are a regular part of the program	Full range of Wildfire Management Response and Fuels treatments	Full FMP Can be either text based or spatially represented.	EA or EIS	Annual Review required FMP revision tied to the revision of CCPs

1 Every unit managed by the Service which has burnable vegetation must have an approved
2 FMP. Units meeting the exemption criteria defined in Table 9.1 are not required to develop or
3 maintain a Fire Management Plan. Units which do not meet the exemption criteria must
4 maintain a Fire Management Plan unless exempted in writing by the Regional Director.
5

6 The newly developed 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework is consistent with the
7 planning requirements identified in the Risk Categories in Table 9.1. The Framework is
8 scalable in nature so you can developed a FMP that is more in line with the complexity and
9 scope of your unit. The new *DOI FMP Framework* may be found in the [Fire Management
10 Planning Sharepoint Page](#). If the management of wildfire on a unit is 'suppression only' with
11 through an MOU or any other agreement and no fuels treatments are planned, the newly
12 developed *Wildfire Response Plan* can be used. It can be found in the same link as the DOI
13 FMP Framework.
14

15 An approved FMP allows a manager to consider a wide range of management responses to
16 wildfires and to conduct prescribed fires. FMPs must be coordinated and approved by the
17 responsible Agency Administrator to ensure consistency with approved CCPs and other
18 management plans (e.g., habitat management plans).
19

20 **Annual Updates:** FMPs are intended to be dynamic and reflect current situations and
21 policies; therefore, to maintain currency, FMPs must be reviewed each year using the
22 nationally established [annual review process](#). Minor plan revisions may be accomplished
23 through an amendment added to the plan and signed by the line officer and servicing fire
24 management officer. A copy of a signed amendment, along with changes to the FMP and
25 appendices will be sent to the Regional office for documentation and updating of their copy of
26 the FMP. Without a current FMP, prescribed fires cannot be conducted and response to
27 unplanned ignitions can only consider suppression strategies. Preparedness and prevention
28 activities can continue in the interim period as outlined in the expired plan.
29

30 **Revisions:** FMPs can be revised at any time; however, revisions are required following the
31 completion or revision of a CCP or when significant changes occur. An example of such
32 changes would be acquiring new lands for the unit that are different than those currently on the
33 unit and will need to be managed differently. Major scheduled revisions to the FMP will
34 follow the 15 year CCP revision cycle to provide consistency in objectives and management
35 strategy formulation. The FMP revisions stated in this 'revision' section will require Regional
36 Office review and approval.
37

38 All new FMPs and those needing revisions due to significant change in land use or other
39 circumstances will 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework (See Fishnet - Fire
40 Management SharePoint – under Fire Management Plan Resources folder) and apply the most
41 recent Service-specific guidance as it applies to the Framework. Units that are revising FMPs
42 may consider producing a spatially represented product in lieu of the standard text product.
43 Contact the National Planner for additional information on these types of products.
44

45 Information required within the FMP depends on the wildland fire management activities the
46 unit plans on implementing. As described above, if a unit is not planning on completing fuel
47 treatments or using multiple objective wildfire, a FMP that addresses wildfire response and
48 post wildfire rehabilitation is sufficient. If the unit plans on using fuels treatments and/or

1 multiple objective wildfires, then these strategies must also be addressed within the FMP and
2 associated NEPA documents.

3
4 All wildfires will receive a management response. The response to wildfire includes all of the
5 response actions necessary to manage a wildfire for the duration of the event. Therefore, the
6 FMP must address a full range of wildfire management strategies for suppression and/or
7 multiple objective wildfire incident management. It is also necessary to fully describe
8 limitations or constraints that may apply to tactical operations.

9
10 As practicable, development of FMPs should take place on an interagency basis with
11 involvement of local partners, especially those with adjoining boundaries or who provide fire
12 management services through agreements or other approved instruments.

13
14 FMPs should describe the approval process and approving official for prescribed fire plans
15 and any other related operational plans as needed. Required elements and components of
16 prescribed fire plans are listed and described in the current version of the *Interagency*
17 *Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide*.

18 **National Environmental Policy Act Compliance**

19 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requirements for activities on Service lands are
20 described in 621 FW1 and the 505 FW and 550 FW manual chapters. Additional
21 Departmental NEPA procedures may be referenced in 516 DM 1-6; or consult with the
22 Regional NEPA Specialist for details on the NEPA process.

23
24
25 Fuels reduction Categorical Exclusions (CE) developed by the Department of the Interior and
26 by the Service are available for use if appropriate. Departmental CEs are listed in 43 CFR
27 46.210(k). Service-specific CEs are listed in 516 DM 8, 8.5 B (4-5).

28
29 Any CE whether it be Departmental or Service CEs cannot be used if exceptions to the CE
30 apply. These exception are listed under 43 CFR part 46 Section 46.215 and must be
31 thoroughly considered and discarded before a CE can be utilized.

32 **National Historic Preservation Act Compliance**

33 Service National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) policy is found in Service Manual
34 Chapters 614 FW 1-5 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines on Historic
35 Preservation.

36 **Other Regulatory Compliance**

37 Other compliance requirements include Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), (as
38 amended in 1973), Section 810 of the 1980 Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act,
39 and Section 118 of the Clean Air Act (as amended in 1990). Additional federal, state and local
40 compliance requirements may also exist.
41