



File Code: 5100
Route To:

Date: August 2, 2021

Subject: Chief's Wildland Fire Direction

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs, and WO Directors

The 2021 fire year is different from any before. On July 14, 2021, the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group raised the national preparedness level (PL) to 5, the earliest point in a decade and the third earliest ever. There are currently over 70 large fires burning across the nation and 22,000 personnel responding, which are both nearly three times more than the 10-year average for the month of July. Severe drought is affecting over 70 percent of the West, and the potential for significant fire activity is predicted to be above normal into October. Our firefighters are fatigued, especially after more than a year of almost constant deployments, beginning with helping Australia in January 2020, and continuing through a difficult 2020 fire year and then supporting the vaccination effort in early 2021. In addition, COVID-19 infections are rising again. They are degrading our firefighting response capacity at an alarming rate, which will persist until more Americans are vaccinated.

In short, we are in a national crisis. At times like these, we must anchor to our core values, particularly safety. In PL 5, the reality is we are resource limited. The core tenet of the Forest Service's fire response strategy is public and firefighter safety above all else. The current situation demands that we commit our fire resources only in instances where they have a high probability of success and they can operate safely and effectively. We will rely on the tested principles of risk management in determining our strategies and tactics.

At this time, for all of these reasons, managing fires for resource benefit is a strategy we will not use. In addition, until further notice, ignited prescribed fire operations will be considered only in geographic areas at or below PL 2 and only with the approval of the Regional Forester after consulting with the Chief's Office. We are in a "triage mode" where our primary focus must be on fires that threaten communities and infrastructure. There is a finite amount of firefighting resources available that must be prioritized and fires will not always get the resources that might be requested. We will support our Agency administrators and fire managers as they make the best choices they can, given the resources at hand, the immediate threats, and the predicted weather.

Let me be clear. This is not a return to the "10 a.m. Policy." This is the prudent course of action now in a situation that is dynamic and fluid. When western fire activity abates, we will resume using all the tools in our toolbox, including wildfire and prescribed fire in the right places and at the right time.

I know we all continue to remember the sacrifices of the fallen. Let us honor them by ensuring we do all we can to get everyone home safely, every single day. Thank you for all you are doing. I'm proud to serve alongside you.

 Recoverable Signature

X 

For
Signed by: MELISSA JENKINS
RANDY MOORE
Chief