

APPENDIX A: FIRE MANAGEMENT POLICY

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Lightning has been igniting fires in the analysis area for millions of years. Native Americans of the Northwest used fire as a tool for hunting, gathering and prevention of high intensity wildfires. In the process, they exerted a powerful influence on the landscape.

Europeans moving into the Pacific Northwest initially used fire as a tool for clearing land and creating pasture. As settlement progressed, people saw a need to control or eliminate forest fires. They saw fire as a threat to their settlements and later as a challenge to their attempts to practice forestry in the Northwest.

Large fires and extensive loss of life in the fires of 1910 gave rise to Federal legislation, which established the direction of fire management policy. The Weeks Act of 1911 established cooperative agreements with states and funding mechanisms for fire control.

By the 1920s, a federally funded fire organization had arisen. Its mission: to put fires out by the beginning of the next burning period. This policy was known as the 10 A.M. policy, because the tactical objective for most fires was to have them controlled by 10 A.M. the next day. The policy was effective in controlling low and moderate intensity fires but less so with high intensity fires.

By the late 1970s, research was beginning to demonstrate that total fire control might not be effective policy and that some types of fire were necessary to healthy ecosystem function. By the 1980s, a considerable body of research indicated that fire suppression was giving rise to fuel loading that posed an unacceptable risk to firefighter safety and private property.

CURRENT POLICY

Federal Wildland Fire Policy (1995)

In 1994 an interagency review of fire policy was chartered. This review resulted in the Federal Wildland Fire Policy in 1995 ([Federal Wildland Fire Policy](#)).

Key points:

- Firefighter and public safety is the first priority.
- Wildfire, as a critical natural process, must be reintroduced into the ecosystem.
- Where fire cannot be safely introduced, pretreatment must be considered.

- Wildfire management decisions go hand in hand with resource management decisions.
- The role of federal agencies in Wildland/Urban Interface areas is firefighting, hazard reduction and education.
- Structural fire protection is the responsibility of tribal, state and local governments.
- Western governors will involve state and local agencies in achieving a cooperative approach to fire management.
- Federal agencies will emphasize shared learning about why and how fire is managed.
- Fire exclusion is a misnomer. Low intensity and moderate intensity fire has been excluded (USDA *et al.*, 1995).
- Fire managers should use adaptive management and avoid the tendency described as “Land managers often feel the need to wait for scientific certainty before acting.”
- Every area with burnable vegetation will have an approved fire management plan.
- The simple “Smokey Bear” message obscures the complexity of fire.

Recommendations:

- ☞ Prioritize wildfire protection in term of:
 - Human life,
 - Property, and
 - Resource values.
- ☞ Develop fire management plans for all areas subject to fires.
- ☞ Evaluate ecosystem conditions and prioritize areas for reintroducing fire.
- ☞ Establish fire management demonstration areas.
- ☞ Establish a consistent, interdisciplinary, interagency fire message and convey it to the public and employees.
- ☞ Train agency employees in fire ecology.

The Northwest Forest Plan (1994)

The Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP) recognizes fire as a critical natural process. The Plan also recognizes that conversion of older forests to early successional stages has threatened a number of old growth dependent species, including the Northern Spotted Owl. The relative scarcity of old growth habitat imposes constraints on the use of prescribed fire.

The NWFP addresses wildfire in Appendix B8: Fire Management Standards and Guidelines, Pages B133 -B136 (1994).

General

Fire managers will respond to all wildfires by taking appropriate suppression responses. In most cases, responses will consist of aggressive initial attack.

Fire management plans will be written or revised for all areas, as necessary, consistent with existing guidance. The plans will be developed in an interdisciplinary manner.

The use of prescribed fire for ecosystem management will restore processes that have been limited by relatively effective fire exclusion.

The goal is to reduce the risk of large scale, high intensity wildfires which will prevent land managers from meeting resource management objectives.

Prescribed fire

Resource experts should be involved in project level plans. Adhere to air quality Standards & Guidelines (S&Gs). Fire should be used to restore or maintain ecosystem processes or structures.

Allocation-Specific Direction

- ☞ *Late Successional Reserves (LSRs)* – “Specific fire management plans will be prepared prior to any habitat manipulation.”
- ☞ *Riparian and Late-Successional Reserves* - the goal is to limit the size of all fires.
- ☞ *Adaptive Management Areas (AMAs)* – “fire managers are actively encouraged to ...research the role and effects.... of fire...”
- ☞ *Congressionally Reserved Areas* - Follow the direction in existing Forest plans.
- ☞ *Administratively Withdrawn Areas* - Fire management activities should be guided by existing plans.
- ☞ *Matrix* - Coordinate with local governments in Wildland/Urban Interface areas.

Direction for Late Successional Reserves and adjacent lands

The NWFP Record of Decision (ROD) Pages B-7 and 8 states that:

- Underburning can be used to reduce fuel loading and vertical fuel continuity.
- To increase effectiveness, underburning should be implemented over large areas.
- Many of these treatments may reduce the quality of habit for late successional organisms.
- There is a need for a balanced approach that reduces risk of fire while protecting large areas of fire-prone late successional forest.

Region 6 Fuels Policy (1999)

The Region Six fuels strategy identifies six strategic actions to reduce fuel-related hazards on federal lands in the Pacific Northwest:

1. Define, plan and develop Hazardous Fuels Treatments (HFT) within the context of ecosystem health and restoration.
2. Coordinate planning, fuels treatment and smoke management activities on geographic and sub-geographic levels.
3. Develop education plans and marketing strategies to increase awareness of HFT with internal and external publics.
4. Refine the process for most efficiently allocating HFT funds.
5. Increase the skills, knowledge and capabilities of the workforce for the future.
6. Monitor HFT accomplishments against defined goals at all levels.

The Willamette Forest Plan (1990)

Wildfire

The 1990 Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) calls for an appropriate suppression response to wildfire. A Wildfire Situation Analysis (WSA) will be prepared for fires that escape initial attack. An on-site analysis will identify the appropriate suppression strategy. Where firefighter or public safety is at risk, a control strategy will be utilized.

Prescribed Fire – Non-wilderness

Prescribed fire will be used to reduce fuels only by the most cost-effective method. Treatments will be tied to the requirements of specific land allocations. Prescribed fires should remain within pre-determined prescription criteria.

The Eugene District and Salem District Resource Management Plans

Suppression

The Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP) directs the Eugene BLM to “Minimize the direct negative impacts of wildfire suppression on ecosystem management objectives”. The plan goes on to say that in most cases the response to fire starts is aggressive initial attack. Fires escaping initial attack are required to have a Wildfire Situation Analysis (WSA), which will compare the tradeoffs inherent in suppressing the fire.

Fuels

The LRMP calls for modification of fuel profiles to lower the risk of stand replacing wildfires. Fuels modification will only take place after Hazard Reduction Plans are developed by interdisciplinary teams.

Prescribed Fire Use

The use of prescribed fire will be based on the risk of high intensity wildfire. Underburning will be reintroduced in areas over a period of time in order to produce a mosaic of stand conditions. The use of prescribed fire will be based on an interdisciplinary evaluation.

Wilderness Prescribed Fire Plan (1996)

The Three Sisters, Mount Jefferson and Mount Washington Wilderness are included in this plan. Its objectives are allowing lightning fires to play their natural role, to the extent possible, while reducing the risk and consequences of fires. Primary risks include escape of fire from Wilderness to private lands and watershed damage. The decision to suppress a natural ignition rests with the line officer (District Ranger or Forest Supervisor.) The Wilderness Prescribed Fire Plan has not been implemented.

The Mid Willamette Late Successional Reserve Assessment (1998)

This is an assessment of 11 Late Successional Reserves (LSRs) comprising 328,656 acres of BLM and USFS lands and 414 core LSRs comprising 44,443 acres. These lands are managed primarily for the Northern spotted owl and other late successional species. The Assessment makes recommendations for fire management within and adjacent to these reserves. It recognizes a range of historic fire regimes, from an average frequency (*i.e.*, a mean fire return interval) of 200 years for stand replacing fires in the northern high elevations to less than 80 years for partial burns in the southern, low elevation LSRs.

Policy recommendations center around reducing risk to owl habitat. The document recommends closing roads and treating portions of high risk areas within and adjacent to LSRs.

Treatment to reduce fine fuels is a priority in the southern fire zone, where fire risk is high or moderate.

Summary of Fire Management Policy Direction

Fire policy is complex, dynamic and involves many layers of direction. For purposes of a strategic document, we can say that the main components are:

- Firefighter and public safety is the first priority.
- Wildfire, as a critical natural process, should be reintroduced into the ecosystem.

- Where fire cannot be safely reintroduced, pretreatment should be considered.

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