

Chapter 09 Wildland Fire Management Planning

Scope

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 due to the need for coordination at local, regional and national levels as well as incorporating the missions of the Service, the National Wildlife Refuge System (NWRS) and the National Fish Hatchery System (if there is a desire to use wildland fire for land management purposes). The fire management 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, Zone Fire Management Officers (ZFMO), and other fire and Service personnel to develop, review, and update Fire Management Plans (FMP) that provide for safe, effective and efficient actions for wildland fire, non-fire fuels reduction, and other related operations. An outline of responsibilities at local, regional, and national levels is included in Chapter 9 of the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#) (Redbook, NFES #2724).

Authorities for Wildland Fire Management

There is a list of Acts and 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 the Service's [Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#).

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 fire staff, wildlife biologist(s), cultural resource specialist(s), 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 Zone 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 reviewed for revision within the same planning effort and timeframe. If the review of the FMP during this revision reveals that it is still valid to support the unit fire management needs as written, there is

1 no need to rewrite the FMP. However, the FMP review/revision requires a signature
2 page signed at the regional level even if there are no changes needed. The new signature
3 page for the FMP will contain the same date as the CCP revision.

4 **Regional Fire Management Planning Responsibilities**

5 Regional Office fire management personnel are responsible for coordinating unit and
6 geographic area fire management planning efforts within their Region. In addition, they
7 are required to establish a formal FMP review and approval process with regional subject
8 matter experts if the FMP is in need of revision along with the CCP. This will include
9 identifying staff to provide biological, technical, fiscal and policy reviews of the FMP.
10 The reviewing staff should be provided with parameters of the review upfront to help
11 expedite the process. The Regional Fire Management Coordinator (RFMC), the Regional
12 Refuge Chief, and their staff are consulted as needed. The Regional Director, or their
13 designee, must approve all FMPs.

14 RFMCs will determine if preparedness plans are needed at the refuge/unit level or if
15 those plans developed by respective Geographic Area Coordination Centers (GACC)
16 provide adequate guidance.

17 18 **National Fire Management Planning Responsibilities**

19 The Service Director and the Chief of the NWRS are responsible for related policy and
20 for ensuring that FMPs are current. Development of policy and oversight of wildland fire
21 planning is delegated to the NWRS Branch of Fire Management in the Division of
22 Natural Resources and Planning. The Branch Chief and staff are co-located with other
23 federal Fire Directors at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho.

24
25 Service Fire Management Branch Staff develop and update Service guidance for use with
26 the 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework. (See - [Fire Management Fishnet](#) –
27 under Fire Management Plan Resources folder). They track the status of FMPs in a
28 Fishnet database for periodic reports to the Department or Congress.

29
30 NIFC fire staff review and propose updates to the Service Manual and the Service Fire
31 Management Handbook. They participate as members of interagency committees and
32 work groups under the umbrella of the NWCG which sponsors development and
33 publication of standard training courses, Position Taskbooks, interagency handbooks and
34 guides such as the Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide (PMS 210), and other
35 similar products.

36
37 The NIFC fire staff plays a key Service role in development and execution of budgets for
38 the Wildland Fire Management Programs. The Wildland Fire Management budget is
39 managed as a set of discrete funds within the Department of Interior and has separate
40 Congressional appropriations from other Service functions. The NIFC fire staff relies on
41 wildfire occurrence data reports and prescribed fire and hazardous fuels project
42 implementation planning to develop and allocate budgets. This process is accomplished
43 with the oversight and involvement of the National Fire Leadership Team (NFLT), which
44 is a formal working group chartered by the Regional Refuge Chiefs. Executive

1 membership of the team includes RFMCs from Regions 1-8 and the Fire Management
2 Branch's (FMB) Chief and Deputy Chief.

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

6 The source of the terms and definitions in this chapter is the NWCG [Glossary of](#)
7 [Wildland Fire Terminology](#), which represents federal, state, and local firefighting
8 agencies and departments nationwide. These definitions can change as wildland fire
9 management policies change. For clarification of terms in this chapter and for the latest
10 terms and definitions which may have changed since the update of this chapter, access
11 the NWCG web site.

14 **Fire Management Plan (FMP) Requirements**

15 Every unit managed by the Service which has burnable vegetation must have an approved
16 and current FMP. Units meeting the exemption criteria defined in Table 9.1 below are
17 not required to develop or maintain a FMP. Units which do not meet the exemption
18 criteria must maintain a FMP unless exempted in writing by the Regional Director. The
19 reason(s) for exemption must be well documented.

21 Depending on management strategies addressed in the FMP, an approved FMP allows a
22 manager to consider a wide range of management responses to wildfires and to conduct
23 prescribed fires. FMPs must be coordinated and approved by the responsible Agency
24 Administrator to ensure consistency with approved CCPs and other management plans
25 (e.g., habitat management plans).

27 The 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework was used to develop a more robust
28 FWS FMP Framework ([Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#)) which must be used for
29 all new and revised fire management plans. It was developed to be more efficient and
30 effective and scalable in nature. It allows FMOs responsible for fire management on
31 refuges and hatcheries to develop a FMP that is more in line with the complexity and
32 scope of the unit. It also allows units to represent their FMP in a more spatially
33 represented manner.

35 The parameters for using the *Wildfire Response Plan*, outlined in Table 9-1 below are:

- 36 1) management strategy for wildfires is "Full Suppression" or "Suppression Only";
- 37 2) suppression occurs via an MOU or other Agreement; and
- 38 3) fuels management is not planned or conducted. The *Wildfire Response Plan* can
39 be found on the [Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#).

1 **Table 9-1 FMP Requirements for the Service**

Criteria			Requirements		
Vegetative Description	Wildfire Management Strategy	Fuels Management Strategy	FMP	National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)	Reviews and Revision
No burnable vegetation	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Exempt	Exempt	Exempt
Burnable vegetation	Full Suppression	None	Wildfire Response Plan or Scalable FMP	None	Annual Review Required. FMP Revision tied to revision of CCP(s), other significant changes, or as deemed appropriate at Regional and/or Field Level
	Full Suppression	Utilize Prescribed fire and/or Non-fire treatments	Scalable FMP	EA or EIS	Annual Review Required. FMP Revision tied to revision of CCP(s), other significant changes, or as deemed appropriate at Regional and/or Field Level
	Full Range of Wildfire Management Response	None	Scalable FMP	EA or EIS	Annual Review Required. FMP Revision tied to revision of CCP(s), other significant changes, or as deemed appropriate at Regional and/or Field Level
	Full Range of Wildfire Management Response	Utilize Prescribed fire and/or Non-fire treatments	Scalable FMP	EA or EIS	Annual Review Required. FMP Revision tied to revision of CCP(s), other significant changes, or as deemed appropriate at Regional and/or Field Level

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Table 9.1 has been established to assist FMOs in determining what type of FMP to develop to best meet the fire management complexity of the refuge or fish hatchery. It also will help if a revision is in order due to your program being more or less complex since your last fire management plan. The Service FMP development options including the *Service FMP Framework* and the *Wildfire Response Plan* can be found on the Service’s [Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#).

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

1 **Revisions:** FMPs can be revised at any time; however, revisions are required following
2 the completion or revision of a CCP or when significant changes occur. An example of
3 such changes would be acquiring new lands, refuge, or hatchery for the unit that is
4 different than those currently on the unit and will need to be managed differently.
5 Scheduled revisions to the FMP will follow the 15 year CCP revision cycle to provide
6 consistency in objectives and management strategy formulation. The FMP modifications
7 determined in this 'revision process' will require Regional Office review and approval.
8 If, while revisiting the FMP during the CCP revision process, it is found that the FMP is
9 still valid as it stands or only minimal changes are needed that could be addressed during
10 the annual update, then a new signature page should be signed by the appropriate
11 individuals (as per regional direction). The guidance in the FMP can be instituted when
12 the signature process is complete.

13
14 All new FMPs and those needing revisions due to significant change in land use or other
15 circumstances will use the most recent FWS Fire Management Plan Framework (See
16 Fishnet - Fire Management Fishnet– under Fire Management Plan Resources folder).
17 Refuges and hatcheries that are revising FMPs may consider producing a spatially
18 represented product in lieu of the standard text product. Contact the National Planner for
19 additional information on these types of products.

20
21 Information required within the FMP depends on the wildland fire management activities
22 the refuge or hatchery plans on implementing. As described above, if a refuge or
23 hatchery is not planning on completing fuel treatments or using multiple objective
24 wildfire, a FMP that addresses wildfire response and post wildfire rehabilitation is
25 sufficient. If the unit plans on using fuels treatments and/or multiple objective wildfire,
26 then these strategies must also be addressed within the FMP and associated NEPA
27 documents.

28
29 All wildfires will receive a management response. The response to wildfire includes all
30 of the response actions necessary to manage a wildfire for the duration of the event.
31 Therefore, the FMP must address a full range of wildfire management strategies for
32 suppression and/or multiple objective wildfire incident management. It is also necessary
33 to fully describe limitations or constraints that may apply to tactical operations.

34
35 As practicable, development of FMPs should take place on an interagency basis with
36 involvement of local partners, especially those with adjoining boundaries or who provide
37 fire management services through agreements or other approved instruments.

38
39 FMPs should describe the approval process and approving official for prescribed fire
40 plans and any other related operational plans as needed. Required elements and
41 components of prescribed fire plans are listed and described in the current version of the
42 *Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide*.

43 **National Environmental Policy Act Compliance**

44 NEPA requirements for activities on Service lands are described in 621 FW1 and the 505
45 FW and 550 FW manual chapters. Additional Departmental NEPA procedures may be
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1 referenced in 516 DM 1-6; or consult with the Regional NEPA Specialist for details on
2 the NEPA process. There is new direction from the Department of Interior Secretary to
3 make both Environmental Assessments (EA) and Environmental Impact Statements (EIS)
4 more efficient. Time restrictions and page limits have been imposed on both of these
5 products. Information on the new regulations for EAs/EISs can be found at [Fire](#)
6 [Management Planning Fishnet Page](#).

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8 Fuels management Categorical Exclusions (CE) developed by the Department of Interior
9 and the Service are available for use if appropriate. Currently, Bureaus and the
10 Department are developing new CEs for use by the bureaus. When they are completed,
11 they will be on the Fishnet page listed above. Current Departmental CEs are listed in The
12 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) at 43 CFR 46.210(k). Service-specific CEs are listed
13 in DOI Departmental Manual 516 DM 8, 8.5 B (4-5). A form for documenting the use of
14 these CEs is available on the [Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#).

15
16 CEs (Departmental or Service) cannot be used if exceptions to the CE apply. These
17 exceptions are listed under 43 CFR 46.215 and must be thoroughly evaluated before a CE
18 can be utilized.

19 20 **National Historic Preservation Act Compliance**

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

24 **Other Regulatory Compliance**

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