

## 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) and habitat management plans 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.

## **Regional Fire Management Planning Responsibilities**

Regional Office fire management personnel are responsible for coordinating unit 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 if the FMP is in need of revision along with the CCP. This will include identifying staff to provide biological, technical, fiscal and policy reviews of the FMP. The reviewing staff should be provided with parameters of the review upfront to help expedite the process. The Regional Fire Management Coordinator (RFMC), the Regional Refuge Chief, and their staff are consulted as needed. The Regional Director, or their designee, must approve all FMPs.

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

## **National Fire Management Planning Responsibilities**

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

Service Fire Management Branch Staff develop and update Service guidance for use with the 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework.

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

The NIFC fire staff plays a key Service role in development and execution of budgets for the Wildland Fire Management Programs. The Wildland Fire Management budget is managed as a set of discrete funds within the Department of Interior and has separate Congressional appropriations from other Service functions. The NIFC fire staff relies on wildfire occurrence data reports and prescribed fire and hazardous fuels project implementation planning to develop and allocate budgets. This process is accomplished with the oversight and involvement of the National Fire Leadership Team (NFLT), which is a formal working group chartered by the Regional Refuge Chiefs. Executive membership of the team includes RFMCs from Regions 1-12 and the Fire Management Branch's (FMB) Chief and Deputy Chief.

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

The source of the terms and definitions in this chapter is the NWCG [Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology](#), which represents federal, state, and local firefighting agencies and departments nationwide. These definitions can change as 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 (FMP) Requirements**

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

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

The 2014 DOI Fire Management Plan Framework was used to develop a more efficient and effective FWS FMP Framework ([Fire Management Planning Fishnet Page](#)) which must be used for all new and revised fire management plans. It was developed to be more efficient and effective and scalable in nature. It allows FMOs responsible for fire management on refuges and hatcheries to develop a FMP that is more in line with the complexity and scope of the unit. It also allows units to represent their FMP in a more spatially represented manner. In 2019, the NFLT voted to allow developing FMPs in Arc GIS- Story Map. However, due to the ability to be creative within Story Map, two formats have been selected for use in developing a FWS FMP (consult your Regional planner). If producing the FMP in this format, you will be required to include your annual FMP reviews in a tab within the Story Map FMP. Two formats have been approved for use in developing a FWS FMP. When producing the FMP in this format include the annual FMP reviews in a tab within the Story Map FMP.

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

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

**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

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.

**Revisions:** FMPs can be revised at any time; however, if the refuge or fish hatchery CCP is going through a revision process, the FMP must also be looked at for revisions during that same planning effort and timeframe and should be updated as per CCP changes that may influence fire management on the unit.

Depending on what is being revised for the CCP, a revision to the CCP may or may not trigger a revision to the FMP.

A new dated signature page will be initiated for the CCP and fire management should be included on that page to show fires involvement and that the FMP was also reviewed in that effort. Include the CCP signature page with your FMP to validate the CCP and FMP review.

If the FMP is found to need minor changes during the CCP process that do not change the intent of the FMP, then these changes can be addressed using the annual FMP update process.

Note: to date, there are refuges and fish hatcheries that have not completed their initial CCP. If this is the case for your unit, ensure that someone from fire attends the CCP meetings to discuss and validate fire management information selected for inclusion in the CCP. For those units w/o a CCP ensure that fire staff attends the CCP meetings to discuss and validate fire management information selected for inclusion in the CCP.

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

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

All wildfires will receive a management response. The response to wildfire includes all of the response actions necessary to manage a wildfire for the duration of the event. Therefore, the FMP must address a full range of wildfire management strategies for suppression and/or multiple objective wildfire incident

management. It is also necessary to fully describe limitations or constraints that may apply to tactical operations.

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

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

### **National Environmental Policy Act Compliance**

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

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

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

### **National Historic Preservation Act Compliance**

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

### **Other Regulatory Compliance**

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