

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

The Interagency Federal Wildland Fire Policy Review Working Group (Working Group), at the direction of the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, reviewed the **1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy & Program Review** (1995 Report) and its implementation. The Working Group found that the policy is generally sound and continues to provide a solid foundation for wildland fire management activities and for natural resources management activities of the federal government.

In this Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (Review and Update), the Working Group recommends selected changes and additions to the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (1995 Federal Fire Policy) to clarify purpose and intent and to address issues not fully covered in 1995.

The Working Group further found that implementation of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy remains incomplete in many areas, especially those that involve collaboration, coordination, and integration across agency jurisdictions and across different disciplines. The Working Group recommends a number of strategic implementation actions to ensure that federal wildland fire management policy is successfully implemented in all applicable federal agencies on a collaborative, coordinated, and integrated fashion as quickly as possible. The revisions, additions and implementation actions recommended in this report are presented in Chapter 3 as the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

In summary, the Working Group finds and recommends that federal fire management activities and programs are to provide for firefighter and public safety, protect and enhance land management objectives and human welfare, integrate programs and disciplines, require interagency collaboration, emphasize the natural ecological role of fire, and contribute to ecosystem sustainability.

The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001 Federal Fire Policy) contained in this report replaces the 1995 Federal Fire Policy. It should be adopted by all federal agencies with fire-management-related programs and activities as appropriate through directives, manuals, handbooks, and other documents.

Subsequent to the initiation of this review and update of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture prepared a report, ***Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment: A Report to the President in Response to the Wildfires of 2000*** and the Congress provided substantial new appropriations and guidance in the Fiscal Year 2001 Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act. The activities resulting from the Secretaries' report and the Congressional action are generally known as the National Fire Plan. While this Review and Update supports and complements the National Fire Plan, the two efforts are different. This Review and Update, with its findings and recommendations, provides a broad philosophical and policy foundation for federal agency fire management programs and activities, including those conducted under

the National Fire Plan. In contrast, the National Fire Plan and similar interagency activities, focus on operational and implementation activities. A major feature of the National Fire Plan is the interagency (especially between federal and non-federal entities) aspect of risk reduction planning and implementation. In summary, the 2001 Federal Fire Policy contained in this report is focused on internal federal agency strategic direction for a broad range of fire management related activities while the National Fire Plan is a more narrowly focused and tactical undertaking involving both federal and non-federal entities.

BACKGROUND

The 1995 Report produced the first single comprehensive federal fire policy for the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture. That review was stimulated by the 1994 fire season with its 34 fatalities and growing recognition of fire problems caused by fuel accumulation. The resulting 1995 Federal Fire Policy recognized, for the first time, the essential role of fire in maintaining natural systems.

In the aftermath of the escape of the Cerro Grande Prescribed Fire in May of 2000, the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture requested a review of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation. Their charge to the Working Group included:

- Review the implementation status of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy.
- Address specific issues related to interagency coordination, cooperation, availability, and use of contingency resources.
- Provide recommendations to the Secretaries for strengthening the organizational structure of wildland fire management programs to ensure effective implementation of a cohesive federal wildland fire policy.
- Provide any other recommendations that would improve federal wildland fire management programs.
- Recommend a management structure for completing implementation of the recommendations.

PRINCIPAL CONCLUSIONS

The Working Group reached the following principal conclusions:

- The 1995 Federal Fire Policy is still generally sound and appropriate.
- As a result of fire exclusion, the condition of fire-adapted ecosystems continues to deteriorate; the fire hazard situation in these areas is worse than previously understood.
- The fire hazard situation in the Wildland Urban Interface is more complex and extensive than understood in 1995.
- Changes and additions to the 1995 Federal Fire Policy are needed to address important issues of ecosystem sustainability, science, education, communication, and to provide for adequate program evaluation.

- Implementation of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy has been incomplete, particularly in the quality of planning and in interagency and interdisciplinary matters.
- Emphasis on program management, implementation, oversight, leadership, and evaluation at senior levels of all federal agencies is critical for successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001 Federal Fire Policy).

IMPLEMENTATION

Each of the departments or agencies participating in the review should adopt the Guiding Principles, 2001 Federal Fire Policy statements, and Implementation Actions found in Chapter 3 of this Review and Update. All federal fire program activities should take place in cooperation and partnership with State and other organizations.

Full implementation of many specific Action Items from the 1995 Federal Fire Policy remains critical for the successful implementation of the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The Review and Update contains a detailed listing of the status of those Action Items, along with appropriate future actions based on the 2001 Federal Fire Policy and associated Implementation Actions.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The 2001 Federal Fire Policy and its implementation are founded on the following Guiding Principles:

1. Firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.
2. The role of wildland fire as an essential ecological process and natural change agent will be incorporated into the planning process.
3. Fire management plans, programs, and activities support land and resource management plans and their implementation.
4. Sound risk management is a foundation for all fire management activities.
5. Fire management programs and activities are economically viable, based upon values to be protected, costs, and land and resource management objectives.
6. Fire management plans and activities are based upon the best available science.
7. Fire management plans and activities incorporate public health and environmental quality considerations.
8. Federal, State, tribal, local, interagency, and international coordination and cooperation are essential.
9. Standardization of policies and procedures among federal agencies is an ongoing objective.

KEY THEMES OF THE REVIEW AND UPDATE

- **Ecosystem Sustainability:** The 1995 Federal Fire Policy recognized the role fire plays as a critical natural process. This Review and Update builds on the 1995 Report to include policies recognizing the role of fire in sustaining healthy ecosystems, the restoration and rehabilitation of burned lands, and the importance of sound science in fire management activities.
- **Fire Planning:** The 1995 Federal Fire Policy requires Fire Management Plans for all areas with burnable vegetation. Significant work remains to complete these plans for many areas. Many plans need updating and integration with underlying land management plans. Agencies such as the Departments of Defense and Energy need to coordinate their planning efforts based on the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. Fire Management Plans that address all aspects of fire management activities remain the foundation for implementing the 2001 Federal Fire Policy and must be completed as promptly as possible.
- **Fire Operations:** The 1995 Federal Fire Policy statements on operational aspects of fire management including safety, protection priorities, preparedness, suppression, use of wildland fire, prevention, and Wildland Urban Interface roles and responsibilities, are carried forward in the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The 2001 Federal Fire Policy clearly states that response to wildland fire is based on the Fire Management Plan, not the ignition source or location of the fire. The Review and Update recognizes the need to reach agreement on the requirements for weather products and services, and the best means to meet those requirements.
- **Interagency Coordination and Cooperation:** A key theme of the 1995 Federal Fire Policy is the importance of standardization and interagency cooperation and coordination among federal agencies and between federal agencies and non-federal organizations. The Review and Update recognizes the importance of including additional federal land managing agencies (e.g. Department of Defense and Department of Energy) and agencies with supporting or related programs (e.g. National Weather Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Geological Survey, Federal Emergency Management Agency) as full partners in wildland fire management activities and programs. The Review and Update also adds a specific policy on communication and education to ensure that the 2001 Federal Fire Policy is well understood inside the fire management agencies and by the public.
- **Program Management and Oversight:** The Working Group found that there is no effective means of overseeing and evaluating implementation of fire policy, especially across agency and program lines. A new policy on evaluation is therefore included in the 2001 Federal Fire Policy. The need for a mechanism for coordinated interagency and interdisciplinary fire management program leadership and oversight is included in the Implementation Actions. Other actions to improve program management include analyses of workforce requirements and of fire management and suppression organizational structures.