

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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To: Field Managers, Nevada

From: Deputy State Director, Natural Resources, Lands & Planning

Subject: Wilderness Specialists Participation in Fire Management Program

In a normal fire year, lightning and man-caused fires burn portions of two or three Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) within the State of Nevada. During calendar year 1999, twelve separate fires consumed almost 80,000 acres in eleven WSAs.

Because of the unusually high fire occurrence within WSAs this past fire season, "Fire" was the primary focus at the recent FY 2000 Nevada Wilderness Management Workshop in Elko. During discussions at the workshop, it became evident that during the 1999 fire season, resource advisors with wilderness expertise were not consistently involved in wildfire suppression efforts associated with WSAs.

The purpose of this Information Bulletin, therefore, is to re-emphasize the need to ensure that Field Office Wilderness Specialists are involved in the Fire Management Program as it relates to the management of fire in WSAs. Wilderness Specialists should be involved in: 1) advising local and incoming crews concerning the Interim Management Policy and Minimum Impact Suppression Tactics, 2) participating in the Wildland Fire Situation Analysis for fires inside or threatening WSAs, 3) serving as a Resource Advisor for WSA fires, 4) taking part in close-out and debriefing sessions for fires within WSAs, and, 5) assuming an active role in the preparation of Emergency Fire Rehabilitation Plans including Normal Fire Rehabilitation Plans and Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation Plans. If the lead Wilderness Specialist in each Field Office is unavailable to perform these functions, an acting or back-up Wilderness Specialist should be identified.

While fire is considered a natural element of many WSA ecosystems, fire can be devastating to wilderness values. Fire may change the quality, diversity, and composition of the “naturalness” component of wilderness by opening WSAs to invasive or alien plant species, by altering wildlife populations and habitat, and by reducing native species and mixed stands of vegetation to a monoculture of annuals. In the short term, fire within WSAs may profoundly affect the wilderness component of “solitude” and may degrade the quality of a visitor’s wilderness experience. The effects of fire within WSAs may be visually evident for decades. Visual screening may be diminished or lost making it more difficult for wilderness visitors to avoid the sights, sounds, and evidence of other visitors within WSAs. Unless WSAs are relatively large and contain substantial topographic relief, wilderness visitors may find it difficult to discover secluded locations for their activities.

Accordingly, it is important that Field Office Wilderness Specialists participate fully, as appropriate, in the Fire Management Program to ensure that wilderness values are preserved and protected to the maximum extent possible within Wilderness Study Areas.

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