

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management  
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To: State Directors  
From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation  
Subject: New Wildland Fire Terminology

The purpose of this memorandum is to transmit new terminology associated with the Federal Wildland Fire Policy.

In December 1995, the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior approved the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review which was transmitted under Information Bulletin No. 96-57 on February 2, 1996. Since then, various interagency committees and workgroups have been developing terminology and procedures to bring the Federal wildland fire community in line with the new policy.

On June 12, 1997, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) approved new terminology and developed a flowchart to illustrate the sequence of events that should occur in the management of wildland fire. We have developed a brief explanation of the flowchart. These are attached for your information and use.

The timeline for implementing the terminology and procedures is as follows: Employees should immediately read, discuss, and apply the new policy and terminology in the development of Resource, Fire Management, and Operational Plans. On October 1, 1997, we will begin to officially use the new terminology in budget language, etc. By January 1, 1998, we will fully implement the new terminology and procedures on an interagency basis. You are cautioned, however, that "full implementation" cannot be accomplished without an approved Fire Management Plan that includes, among other things, prescription criteria for using appropriate management actions and responses.

If you have questions concerning implementation of the new policy and procedures, please contact Ed Shepard at (208) 387-5446.

Signed by:	Authenticated by:
Edward W. Shepard	Pat Lewis
Acting Director, Office of Fire and Aviation	Records Manager

4 Attachments

- 1 - Explanation of Terminology (1 p)
- 2 - Wildland Fire Management Terminology (2 pp)
- 3 - Flowchart (1 p)
- 4 - Explanation of Flowchart (1 p)

Distribution

Fire Program Manager  
Aviation Program Manager  
NIFC Administrator  
Jay Thietten, MIB Room 5627

## EXPLANATION OF TERMINOLOGY

The purpose of this white paper is to explain new wildland fire management terms, and provide appropriate rationale. The new terms, as adopted by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, and a "flowchart" of the new terms, with explanation, are attached.

**Above all else, safety of firefighters and the public remains the number one priority in all activities related to fire.**

The Federal Wildland Fire Policy, issued by the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior in 1996, contained some new terms and omitted a few previously used terms.

In addition, language in the annual Appropriations Act for Interior and Related Agencies uses certain terms in lieu of others. Therefore, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, which includes the National Association of State Foresters, has agreed to the new terms and definitions to provide consistency across organizations. Explanation is as follows. New terms are identified in bold italics.

Each BLM District (or Field Office, as appropriate) will have a **Fire Management Plan (FMP)** which describes how **Wildland Fires** and **Prescribed Fires** will be managed. Wildland Fires and Prescribed Fires must be adequately addressed in the Resource Management Plan (RMP) (or Management Framework Plan, as appropriate); i.e., the land use plan guiding fire management must be NEPA compliant. If the RMP is not NEPA compliant with respect to fire management direction, an Environmental Assessment (EA) must be completed for the FMP. If neither the RMP or FMP is NEPA compliant, the options for managing fire are restricted.

The FMP must contain adequate **prescription** elements that are measurable and will guide the selection of **appropriate management responses**. The prescription can be used to help guide decisions during **initial attack** and to describe when fire can be used to achieve natural resource benefits. This provides managers with a full range of appropriate management responses to deal with fire. For example, managers may suppress part of a fire yet allow fire to play a natural role on another portion of the fire.

Bureau policy with respect to fire trespass has not changed. I.e., unauthorized human caused fires should be managed as **wildfires**. In addition if the RMP or FMP are not NEPA compliant or if prescriptive criteria are not adequate, a high priority must be placed on completing or updating existing plans. In the interim, all wildland fires will receive initial attack and be managed as wildfires. If initial attack fails, a **Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA)** must be completed.

Also, if an Appropriate Management Response is taken, but fails because the prescriptive language in the FMP was exceeded, or if a prescribed fire exceeds the prescription (or if the Burn Boss determines that the prescribed fire is likely to exceed the prescription), the fire will be treated as a wildfire and a WFSA will be completed to determine the best course of action.

## WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT TERMINOLOGY

(Adopted by NWCG - 6/12/97)

### DEFINITIONS

**Wildland Fire** - Any non-structure fire, other than prescribed fire, that occurs in the wildland.

**Fire Management Plan** - A strategic plan that defines a program to manage wildland and prescribed fires and documents the Fire Management Program in the approved land use plan. The plan is supplemented by operational procedures such as preparedness plans, preplanned dispatch plans, prescribed fire plans and prevention plans.

**Preparedness** - Activities that lead to a safe, efficient, and cost effective fire management program in support of land and resource management objectives through appropriate planning and coordination.

**Prescription** - Measurable criteria which guide selection of appropriate management response and actions. Prescription criteria may include safety, economic, public health, environmental, geographic, administrative, social or legal considerations.

**Appropriate Management Response** - Specific actions taken in response to a wildland fire to implement protection and fire use objectives.

**Prescribed Fire** - Any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written, approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements must be met, prior to ignition.

**Wildfire** - Any unwanted wildland fire.

**Initial Attack** - An aggressive suppression action consistent with firefighter and public safety and values to be protected.

**Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA)** - A decision-making process that evaluates alternative management strategies against selected safety, environmental, social, economical, political, and resource management objectives as selection criteria.

### OBSOLETE TERMS

Many traditional terms have either been omitted or made obsolete by the Policy. The terms listed here have uses or connotations that are contrary to the new Policy.

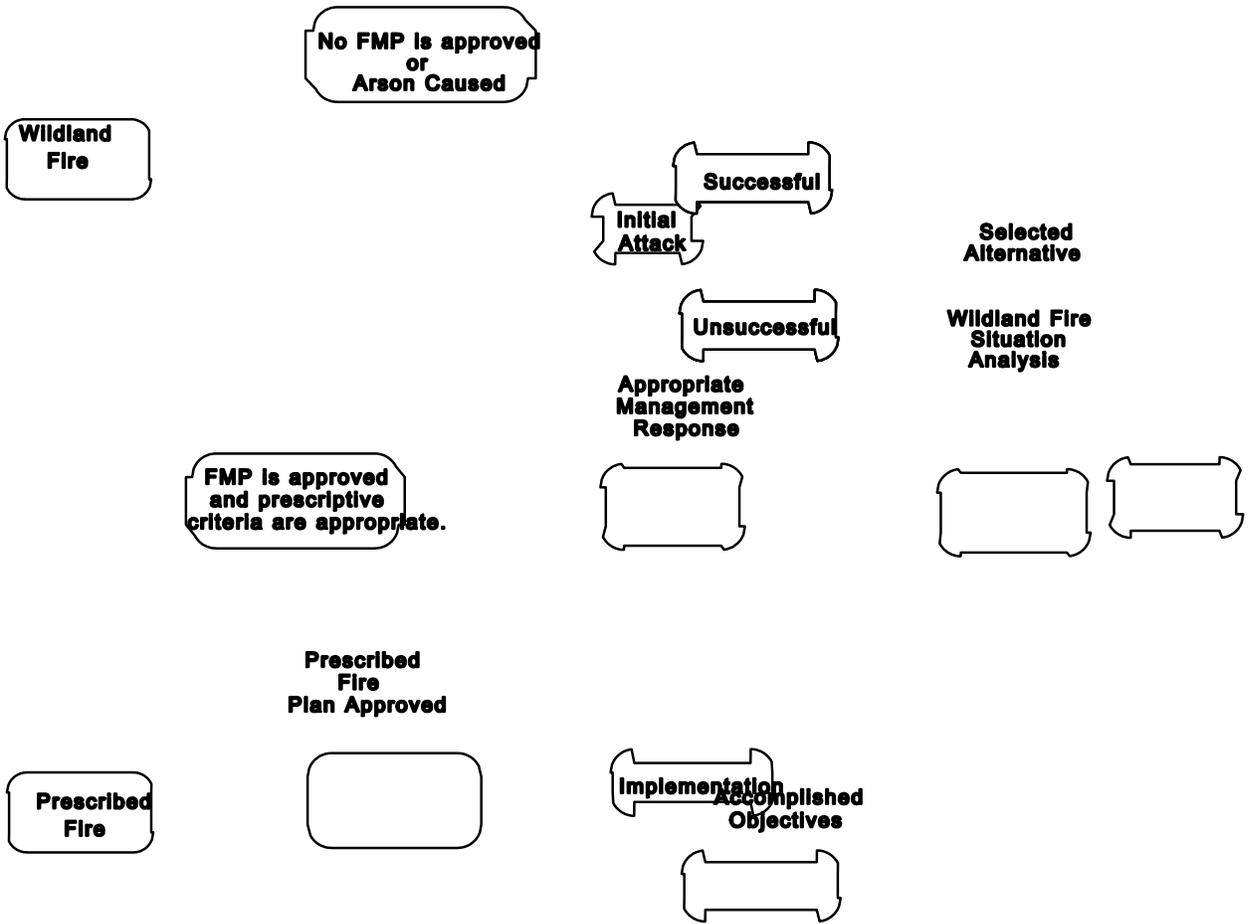
**Presuppression** - The term "presuppression" has been replaced by the term "preparedness" to match Policy and appropriations language.

**Prescribed Natural Fire**

**Management Ignited Prescribed Fire**

**Escaped Fire Situation Analysis** - This term is replaced by Wildland Fire Situation Analysis.

**Confine/Contain/Control** - These terms, when used in the context of suppression strategies, are confusing since they also have tactical meanings. Containment and control are assumed to maintain their definition for fire reporting purposes.



## EXPLANATION OF THE FLOWCHART

There are two types of fire: Prescribed Fire and Wildland Fire.

### Prescribed Fire

A Prescribed Fire is any fire ignited by management actions to meet specific objectives. A written and approved prescribed fire plan must exist, and NEPA requirements must be met, prior to ignition. The plan must be implemented as written and approved.

The prescribed fire is successful if objectives were accomplished. If one or more of the prescriptive criteria are exceeded, or in the estimation of the Burn Boss are about to be exceeded, the prescribed fire is unsuccessful and a WFSA is completed. Initial attack should be initiated immediately rather than wait for the WFSA analysis and decision. Note that this process does not relieve prescribed fire plans of the requirement for an embedded contingency plan.

### Wildland Fire

The flowchart depicts two paths, depending on whether an approved FMP exists and whether a person caused fire is subject to fire trespass.

**No approved FMP exists or the fire is subject to trespass:** The fire is a wildfire and initial attack is initiated. However, common sense still applies and safety and cost of suppression should be designed into all suppression actions. If initial attack is successful, no further action is required. If initial attack is unsuccessful, a WFSA will be prepared to evaluate alternative management strategies and select the appropriate strategy. This process is continued until the fire is out. Under this scenario, wildfires cannot be managed to achieve natural resource management objectives.

**Approved FMP exists, the fire is not subject to trespass, and prescriptive criteria in the FMP are appropriate under the current circumstances:** This scenario provides for natural resource benefits to be achieved through the appropriate management response(s) as identified in the FMP. The full range of management options are available, based on existing policy. I.e., safety of firefighters and the public clearly remain the number one priority, whereas the value of property and natural resources at risk must be clearly identified and evaluated in order to select the appropriate actions. If the appropriate management response is successful, no further action is required. If the response fails, a WFSA is completed and additional management actions are implemented until the fire is out.