

Appendix D
Fire Planning Process

EXCERPTED FROM
MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS OF FIRE USE IN WILDLAND AREAS
SUBJECT TO MIXED SEVERITY FIRE REGIMES IN THE
SOUTHWESTERN UNITED STATES

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The following describes the planning process for fire use..

...Planning: Prerequisite to successful application of fire to ecosystems subject to mixed severity fire regimes is detailed planning at all levels of the planning process. These levels include: land management planning, fire management planning, and specific fire implementation action planning.

Wildland fire use is directly influenced by the land management planning process. The flow of information begins with the land and resource management plan; it determines the availability of land for resource management, predicts levels of resource use and outputs, and provides for a variety of resource management practices. Issues and opportunities are identified and acceptable alternatives are selected that address fire management needs for the geographic area encompassed by the plan. A full understanding of the fire and fuel dynamics of affected ecosystems must be displayed at this level. Without an approved land management plan addressing wildland fire use, this strategy cannot be utilized.

The next planning process step is preparation of the Fire Management Plan. This represents the functional activity plan for the fire management program. The Fire Management Plan (FMP) is the primary tool for translating programmatic direction developed in the land management plan into on-the-ground action. The FMP synthesizes broad fire management goals and places them into a strategic context. Criteria for making initial action decisions must be a component of the Fire Management Plan. Knowledge of historic fire frequency, spatial extent, and intensity and severity is crucial in setting fire management objectives, leading to operational plans, and implementing activities and must be included in fire management plans. The importance of the fire management plan is reinforced in the Federal Fire Policy which states, "Every area with burnable vegetation must have an approved Fire Management Plan." Units lacking a completed and approved fire management plan are not able to implement wildland fire use.

The most detailed step in the process involves the tactical implementation of strategic objectives for the wildland fire use program. It is at this level where a specific plan is prepared to guide implementation of fire-related direction on the

ground. For wildland fire use, this plan is called the Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP). A Wildland Fire Implementation Plan is initiated for all wildland fires being managed for resource benefits. However, only the most complex fires will require completion of all parts of a WFIP. The full WFIP consists of three distinct stages that are progressively developed for wildland fires managed for resource benefits or where initial attack is not the selected response. Objectives, fire location, cause, conditions of fuel continuity, current fire activity, fire location, predicted weather and fire behavior conditions, and risk assessment results will indicate when various WFIP Stages must be completed. Most wildland fires will require completion of only the initial stages during their management. As resource benefits become more important as strategic decision factors, fire activity increases, identified threats increase, and operational mitigation actions increase, additional planning and documentation requirements are involved.

Completion of the most detailed portion of the WFIP involves the establishment of a planning area reference. This is defined as the Maximum Manageable Area (MMA) and represents the firm limits of management capability for the particular fire. The MMA forms the basis for identifying natural defensibility or how well the projected fire area is confined by fuel breaks and natural barriers. As a planning reference, it facilitates identification of all values to be protected inside the MMA and development of management action points where mitigation actions are initiated and implemented.