

**File Code:** 5100**Date:** July 14, 2021**Route To:****Subject:** Chief's Letter for Wildfire Resources**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs, and WO Directors

As expected, the 2021 Fire Year is proving to be an extremely challenging one. We have reached a critical point in our national response efforts and we must make every resource available. On June 22, 2021, the National Multi-Agency Coordination Group raised the National Preparedness Level to 4, because of increasing numbers of fire outbreaks occurring throughout the West. We are seeing severe fire behavior that resists control efforts. Further, the seasonal forecast for the entire Western United States remains extreme for the next several months. We expect demand for resources to outpace resource availability, and our workforce remains fatigued and in need of recovery following last year's record-setting fire season, and active hurricane season, and strenuous efforts to respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The only way we will be able to carry the burden facing us is to shoulder it together. We must focus our limited resources on places that need the most help. As we respond to this fire crisis, we must also do our best to ensure the health, wellness, and safety of our workforce, while we work to protect the diverse communities, landscapes, and citizens we serve. We remain committed to ensuring every employee in this agency must work in an environment that is free of harassment. We'll do this by anchoring to all of our core values, especially to our values of safety, service, and interdependence.

I ask for your full cooperation at this critical juncture. We will need to prioritize fire management work and do all we can to make available the people and resources to assist in managing this national wildland fire emergency. I expect all mission support supervisors to prioritize personnel and resources to sustain critical mission support to wildland fire response operations and make all "red-carded" personnel available for fire assignments. This includes contracting officers, land mobile radio and information technology specialists, human resources specialists, safety managers, and those in incident finance. We also need availability for natural resource advisors, Burned Area Emergency Response team members, and public information officers to work with incident management teams and communities.

I understand this direction requires us to make difficult trade-offs with our other high-priority mission work. This is especially challenging at present, when we are working diligently to accomplish performance goals and restoration outcomes. As the mission support workforce shifts priorities to fire, this also means trade-offs in non-fire contracts, hires, grants, payments, among others. Further, our valued partners and cooperators also expect our support in joint endeavors to complete priority work on the ground. We all recognize our internal capacity is stretched and the needs for fire management are overriding. I ask you to shift priorities to the



national fire response crisis and work closely with our partners and cooperators to make these difficult trade-offs.

We will work together to adjust to the impacts these tough choices pose for our collective goal to achieve national targets and mission outcomes on the ground. The agency will fully back and support you as you make these shifts so we can sustain support for our national response to this historic fire year.

To ensure you maintain maximum flexibility of the available workforce, I am asking regional and local Certifying Officials to also consider granting a one-year certification for employees who hold expired Incident Qualification & Certification System cards in non-operations and command positions where appropriate. This request, however, does not override medical or physical fitness standards required for any position. I also ask that you ensure Agency Administrators are available to serve as coaches or be assigned in a primary role as needed. Whether they are called onsite or can assist virtually, we will need your support as we address wildland fire management as our highest priority at this time.

Over the past year, we saw the effectiveness of our COVID-19 mitigation strategies, not just on COVID-19 infections, but on other viral infections. Please continue to use the COVID-19 mitigation strategies as the most effective means to keep all our co-workers safe. In particular, continue to emphasize the importance of wearing masks in fire camps where vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals are coming into contact with one another. Thank you for living up to our safety core value and our Code and Commitment to Protect One Another by adhering to these pandemic protocols.

The challenge facing us is being magnified by fatigue on individuals, our relationships, and the system as a whole. To help reduce fatigue we are instituting a required three-day rest period for all personnel returning from a 14-day fire assignment, or a two-day rest period for those working 14 continuous and extended days in support of local fire management. Generous consideration for additional rest periods should be made in circumstances where fatigue is evident but does not fit standard handbook guidance for days off. In addition, extensions beyond 14-day assignments should be made sparingly. Such extensions must be approved by the employee's home unit line officer. Prior to approval, the leadership requesting the employee's extension (e.g. Crew Boss) must discuss the employee's fatigue level with the home unit. I also ask that everyone slows down and takes the time needed to be deliberate with intentions and clear about priorities, always weighing the risks before we engage in wildland fire response. Our work in wildland fire is risky. When we have this much exposure, we see a trend of increasing serious accidents and injuries. This is to be expected, however, not to be accepted. These measures to address fatigue are needed to give employees the rest they need to maintain resiliency through the remaining months of the fire year.

Please also continue to anchor to the vision of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and do your part to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire. Please stress to field leaders the importance of using fire management strategies that ensure the highest probability of success in priority locations for the least amount of exposure for our personnel and resources.

As you know, we are all interdependent. We must work effectively with our partners to ensure a collective understanding of fire management strategies, remembering to use all the tools in our toolbox, including but not limited to, full perimeter control.

These choices are never easy. Both incoming Chief Randy Moore and I agree: This shift in direction is necessary at this time to allow us to respond to the enormity of the national wildfire crisis we all face. Thank you for your leadership, for supporting our employees and working with our valued partners and cooperators at this difficult time, even as we continue our national leadership transition.

Lastly, please remember the sacrifices of the fallen. Let us honor them by ensuring we do all we can to get everyone home safe, every day.

  
VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN  
Chief