Sustainability is central to the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service’s mission. We ask those who support fire operations to identify opportunities to apply sustainable business practices and to leverage the Greening Fire Team tools and resources. It is important that actions to reduce consumption of financial and natural resources are implemented without compromising firefighter and public safety or impeding incident objectives. The 2022 Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book) reinforces these requirements:

“Every incident should seek opportunities to reduce unnecessary waste and limit impacts associated with management actions. This can be accomplished, for example, by implementing “greening fire” sustainability best management practices (e.g., energy and water conservation, alternative energy, sustainable acquisition, and waste prevention and recycling), as long as such efforts do not compromise operational or safety objectives. To the degree possible, prioritize the procurement of sustainable products and services whenever lifecycle cost effective.” (Source).

Now more than ever, employee health and safety are our number one priority. The unique challenges associated with COVID-19 also present an opportunity to synchronize safety and sustainability, to find ways to be more conscientious, and to think “outside the box”. Let’s work together to pivot our incident management operations in a way that can fulfill these multiple objectives.

Specifically, we expect the following during the 2022 fire year:

- Line Officers include expectations for implementing sustainability Best Management Practices on incidents (see sample language) in the Delegation of Authority/Letter of Leader’s Intent and at Incident Management Team in-briefings. Line Officers will provide on-forest assistance with identifying local sustainability resources.
- At Type 1 and Type 2 incidents, incident management teams leverage the On-site Incident Recycling Blanket Purchase Agreement to order a recycling contractor to reduce waste, where feasible. The Greening Fire Team is working to expand blanket purchase agreement services to include all geographic areas.

Recently published Executive Order 14057 (“Catalyzing America’s Clean Energy Industries and Jobs through Federal Sustainability”) directs all federal agencies to achieve 100 percent carbon pollution-free electricity by 2030, net-zero emissions from federal procurement no later than 2050, net zero emissions
from overall federal operations by 2050, and a 75 percent reduction in federal waste hauled to landfills by 2030. Further, U.S. Department of Agriculture Environmental Department Regulation 5600-05, requires the Forest Service to divert 55 percent of non-hazardous waste from landfills.

The National Greening Fire Team, in partnership with Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management, continues to develop sustainability best management practices, tools, and resources to achieve net zero environmental impact on all large fire incidents by 2030. This program advances federal sustainability requirements consistent with operational and safety objectives in the fire and aviation community.

Last year, 621,575 pounds of waste was diverted from community landfills by incident management teams that ordered on-site recycling services. This reduced the carbon impact by 1,072 tons of carbon dioxide emissions. Recycling on the Dixie fire alone diverted 156,875 pounds of material from local landfills, while diverting 10,480 pounds of perishable food to evacuated animals and 8,546 pounds of non-perishable food to evacuated community members.

Beyond recycling, the National Greening Fire Team microgrant program may be used to implement existing sustainability best management practices, pilot new wildfire sustainability projects and initiatives, and promote cost-containment. In 2021, National Greening Fire Team microgrant projects saved an estimated 4,500 gallons of water, 2,500 gallons of fuel, and 102 staff-hours, while reducing landfill waste by an estimated 7,000 pounds. This saved an estimated $33,000. Learn more about what various units are doing to green fire operations and save money by reading these success stories.

Employees at all levels are encouraged to join the Greening Fire Team Ambassador Program to share ideas, build skills and champion sustainability efforts in fire operations. To request additional information or provide feedback regarding fire-related sustainable operations successes or challenges, contact the National Greening Fire Team email: SM.FS.greeningfire@usda.gov.

Thank you for continuing to work towards a net zero environmental impact by decreasing the environmental footprint in fire operations whenever possible.

JEROME PEREZ
Director, Fire and Aviation Management

cc: FS-pdl National Greening Fire Team; FS-pdl National GFT Ambassadors; FS-pdl National GFT Basic; FS-pdl wo nfs eng SusOps Coordinators; FS-pdl wo nfs eng energy managers; FS-pdl wo nfs osc regional climate coordinators; FS-pdl wo nfs osc staff