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**Route To:**

**Date:** April 11, 2019

**Subject:** Chief's Letter of Intent for Wildland Fire - 2019

**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

As we move into the 2019 fire year, I am reflecting on the challenging year we faced in 2018. As a Nation, we experienced wildfires and devastating hurricanes that forever changed communities. We have also experienced tragedies in the 2019 fire year. Please pause for a moment of silence to reflect upon those lives we lost both on duty and off duty. They have paid the ultimate sacrifice and we will never forget them. I know the deep resilience and love for the land that runs throughout our organization. I anchor to that as we face another year-round fire season and recover and resume work following the 35-day lapse in appropriations. As I reflect on all of these events and the challenges we overcame during the recent shutdown, I am deeply grateful to all of you for the way you respond and take care of our neighbors, each other, and the lands we are privileged to steward.

As I look ahead to the remainder of the 2019 fire year, it is more important than ever we remain grounded in our core values of safety, diversity, conservation, interdependence and service, while we foster a safe, respectful workplace where everyone is valued for their contributions. Everything we do—every part of our mission—depends on creating a workplace where each one of us is able to thrive in our work, free from harassment and safe from harm.

For wildfire response, let me be clear: that we will continue to implement incident response strategies and tactics that commit responders to operations where and when we understand the risks responders may face and where they can be most successful. We will deploy our people under conditions where we protect important values at risk. These decisions will be based on risk-informed trade-off considerations, looking at all available tactics and opportunities, while maintaining relationships with the communities we serve. Each of us must remain committed to “stop, think and talk” before “acting”.

Wildland fire management is vitally important to the land management mission of our agency, to our partners' missions, and to the American people. We must take the necessary steps to ensure we deliver our mission, including those key land management activities that help reduce fire risk, across all land ownerships, as outlined in the President's December 21 Executive Order 13855. This year we will lean into doing business differently, we will work in a spirit of Shared Stewardship, at a larger scale and with shared decision making with the States. Congress has entrusted us with tools to get this job done; we will make maximum use of new authorities in the 2018 Omnibus bill and the 2018 Farm Bill.



With this in mind, I issue this direction to ALL employees. Each of you has a role to play in carrying out our key agency priorities of reducing wildfire risk and improving forest conditions. As you continue to focus on work that delivers successes in these priority areas in 2019, these principles apply:

- We will maintain our commitment to improve the wildland fire system to one that more reliably protects responders and the public, sustains communities and conserves the land.
- We will be responsible for ensuring sound, risk informed decision making that takes into account the best science available and most appropriate use of the right tools at the right time.
- We will engage early with our partners and communities to strengthen relationships even where priorities may differ, to ensure we are sharing risk before fires start, to work towards achieving our shared goals and missions.
- We will use active management that focuses on wildfire risk reduction, forest products and restoration, engaging in cross-boundary collaboration to set landscape-scale treatment priorities with our partners.
- We will also use wildland fire to achieve desired ecological conditions where possible and where it makes sense, setting that intention together with our partners.

We recognize we work in complex environments and the importance of continuing to be committed to the goals of the *National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy*: safe and effective wildfire response, creating resilient landscapes, and working toward fire adapted communities. The *Strategy's* Vision is to safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, live with wildland fire.

I am proud of USDA Forest Service employees and the work we do to meet the wildland fire challenges we face. In 2019, my expectation is for *all* of us to focus our efforts intently on the decisions we make as agency administrators, fire leaders, fire responders and land managers. At the same time, we must continue our work together to build and sustain the work environment that all employees and partners want and deserve. Together, these commitments from each of us will inspire our innate desire to improve the condition of our Nation's forests and grasslands and honor our commitment to be good neighbors.

I want to thank each of you for the great work you do.

  
VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN  
Chief