



United States Department of the Interior



BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
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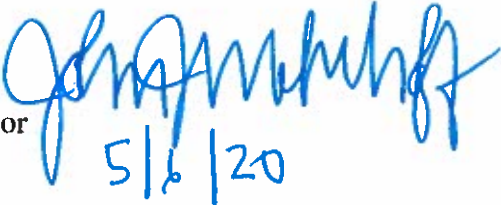
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EMAIL TRANSMISSION -
Memorandum

To: District Managers, Field Managers, Fire Management Officers and Fire Program Personnel

From: John Mehlhoff
BLM Montana/Dakotas State Director

Subject: 2020 Fire Season Leaders Intent



As the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Deputy Director, Policy and Programs, Exercising Authority of the Director laid out in his letter on Expectations for the 2020 Fire Season, the BLM must be ready for wildfire response this year.

It remains our job to protect infrastructure and natural resources from unwanted damaging fire. We need to protect the vast public lands that are a critical part of the economic engine driving this country, while simultaneously minimizing the risk of COVID-19 exposure. Not only do we need to protect our employee's health, we must also protect the health of families, friends, coworkers, and our public.

The 2020 fire season will have a new operating environment for our agency and our interagency partners. This fire season may be one of our most challenging yet with the COVID-19 pandemic and the uncertainty it brings to all of us. I recognize that we do not have all the answers yet and the best management practices will be evolving. We will have to be patient, vigilant, and adaptive in order to protect our own health, the communities we serve, our colleagues, and our families to the best of our abilities from COVID-19 while still protecting them from wildland fire incidents.

More than ever, we must be prepared for wildfire response this summer. I expect our Line Officers and Fire Management Officers to engage early and often with our interagency partners, State, local governments, tribal leaders, health officials and our BLM employees on wildfire response. Managing the impacts of unwanted fire and smoke to our local communities and resources will be challenging given the COVID-19 pandemic. Our employees must continue to maintain the highest levels of situational awareness, especially regarding resource availability and restrictions across jurisdictions.

Safe, aggressive initial attack may be the best suppression strategy to keep unwanted wildfires small and reduce firefighting resource exposure this season. I expect that we will engage wildfire response with strategies and tactics that place our firefighters in areas with high probabilities of success while minimizing exposure to themselves of COVID-19. We need to have a highly qualified, fit, and trained workforce ready and available to respond when called upon. Managers and employees should find ways to continue, refresh and improve their skills, training, and to ensure physical fitness for the season. Managers should ensure their employees are available to support wildfires this summer to help mitigate the limited resource and availability.

Emergency response knows no boundaries. We will continue to support our interagency partners, as well as other Geographic areas in response to wildfires this season. This will only occur after thoughtful risk management consideration. Developing sound risk mitigation tools and applying best management practices to these situations will be key in ensuring the safety of our employees while providing critical mission support. After action reviews and sharing lessons learned will be instrumental to our success this year.

We must continue to foster a harassment-free workplace. We are all responsible to ensure we are fostering a work environment characterized by mutual trust, valuing differences, while listening, and learning from each other. Our employees must work in a safe, healthy, harassment-free, productive environment where all are recognized and valued for their contributions. A harassment and discrimination-free environment will promote crew cohesion and promote a safety-conscious culture during a year of so many unknown factors.

Finally, I recognize that our employees are our greatest resource. No natural cultural resource, home, or item of property is worth a human life. We will stand behind our employees if they get sick, if their families need their attention, and if the pandemic intrudes in some unforeseen way on daily life. For the good of the whole I expect our firefighters to stand down when they feel ill or if they feel uncertain about a situation. We must assure every BLM employee that these difficult decisions will be supported by Montana/Dakotas Leadership.

Signed by:
/s/ John Mehlhoff
State Director

Authenticated by:
Deborah Jackson
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