

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
AND CONSERVATION



STEVE BULLOCK, GOVERNOR

1539 ELEVENTH AVENUE

STATE OF MONTANA

DIRECTOR'S OFFICE (406) 444-2074
FAX: (406) 444-2684

PO BOX 201601
HELENA, MONTANA 59620-1601

To: All DNRC Fire Personnel and Staff

From: John E. Tubbs, Director, MT DNRC

Date: May 15, 2020

RE: Leader's Intent – 2020 Fire Year

Protecting lives and property is the core mission of Montana's DNRC wildland fire program. For fire year 2020, this mission includes protecting our employees and the public against the spread of the COVID-19 virus. I am committed to maintaining our capacity to provide mission critical services while minimizing and mitigating risks associated with COVID-19 for our employees, their families, and the public we serve.

As we head into the heat of the 2020 fire year, I want to emphasize a few key messages to our DNRC fire personnel as well as to Montana's interagency wildland fire community. First, at the DNRC, firefighter and public safety is and always will be our highest priority. DNRC maintains an exemplary safety record, and my commitment to the safety of our personnel, our partner personnel, and the safety of the public we serve is unwavering. DNRC's safety record reflects the high level of performance of our fire personnel and it is your excellence and commitment that we are counting on again this season.

Central to our priority for safety is a directive that the DNRC respond to all fires in our protection immediately and achieve containment quickly. Keeping fires small will minimize the number of personnel needed to effectively combat the fire and provide the greatest protection for the public and resources at risk. Our message of fast and effective initial attack needs to be communicated to our local, state, tribal, and federal partners. We encourage all fire agencies to adopt this imperative to stop all fires with strong initial attack as the 2020 fire season standard. DNRC line officers working with interagency partners should have no question on how we will respond to a fire, if asked. DNRC will respond immediately with one primary goal: *put the fire out as safely and as quickly as possible.*

Further, when DNRC responds to a wildland fire, we will respond understanding the potential risks associated with further spread of the COVID-19 virus. Wildland fire staff availability will only be maintained by protecting against possible vectors that can lead to social transmission of the virus within our ranks. Management

strategies already developed and those being developed are and will be consistent with guidance from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and state health safety guidelines. Clear communication of COVID-19 risk management strategies is critical to keeping our work force safe this season.

Maintaining a high level of public awareness concerning fire risk and the need to prevent human-caused wildfire is essential for the 2020 fire season. Local resources will likely be stressed and bringing in resources from outside will be more complex. Preventing a fire is the best way to protect the public and will allow available, local resources to focus on natural caused ignitions. Fire prevention messages need to be communicated across Montana in as many ways as is practical and as often as media allows.

Management of wildland fire is inherently an interagency effort. We are working to align national plans with ongoing state, tribal, and local efforts across Montana and the Northern Rockies Geographic Area. It is the strong relationships among our partners, built over time and over the long and difficult fire seasons of the past, that form the foundation of our collective success, and I'm counting on DNRC employees to act professionally and to treat our partners and one another with civility, dignity, and respect.

When working with our cooperators, I expect prompt, frequent and transparent communication between Line Officers. Before a wildfire spreads to our protection area, I want Line Officers and Line Officer Representatives to be engaged in the decision-making process, reconciling competing missions and interests. If a cooperating agency determines conditions will not allow direct suppression efforts, I do not expect DNRC to automatically share costs of the fire, should it spread to state protection. Each incident must be thoroughly evaluated to balance our mission of public and resource protection with those of partner agencies.

I also want everyone to remember that we are entrusted by the public and our employees to tell the truth, follow through on commitments, and act with integrity. The public's trust and their expectations for our integrity include our fiscal responsibility and accountability for both our efficiency and effectiveness. At the DNRC, we value cost-effectiveness and strive to provide efficient, effective services without making unnecessary expenditures. However, in wildland fire, we also often spend money to save money, incurring costs to keep fires as small as possible and their duration as short as possible. Consequently, we trust our personnel, expect them to use their professional judgement, and allow them decision space to determine their resource needs and to fill those needs. In return, we expect our people to make responsible and defensible decisions when expending the taxpayers' money.

Professionalism and integrity also extends to the image we portray to the citizens we serve. Remember that we work for the citizens of Montana and represent the

Governor's administration, so please keep your behavior professional and above reproach.

Finally, I want you to know that my team and I recognize the challenges our personnel face related to the stress and fatigue, both physical and psychological, that accompanies fire protection work. I expect you to take care of yourselves and one another during the fire year; this includes assuring that you and your personnel receive adequate time away from work for rest and recovery.

The success of the DNRC's Fire Protection Program depends on your courage, dedication, teamwork, and effort. My intent is for you to provide safe and effective services to Montana's citizens as well as leadership, coordination and resources to the State's wildfire organizations to the best of your ability. It is my intent that you take care of yourselves and one another, manage risk, make decisions that protect the interests of our state and its citizens, and do what we do best – keep fires small and put them out as quickly as we safely can!