United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
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APR 17 2014

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
(Special Attn. Superintendents and Wildland Fire Personnel)

From: Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection

Subject: 2014 Wildland Fire Season – Leader's Intent

Attached is the *2014 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership* signed by Director Jarvis and our interagency partners. This June will mark the one-year anniversary of the Yarnell Hill Fire where 19 firefighters lost their lives in a single day. Over the past decade, more than 170 wildland firefighters have lost their lives throughout the country including some of the finest firefighters in the National Park Service (NPS). These tragedies serve as a constant reminder that firefighting is extremely hazardous and that safety must continue to be our number one priority.

Each year, fire personnel are asked to make extremely difficult decisions in short timeframes, with limited information, and in complex and high-risk environments. While wildland fire operations have inherent risks that cannot be eliminated, we will continue taking steps to reduce and mitigate those risks wherever possible.

As we enter the 2014 wildland fire season, current forecasts predict above normal fire potential for most of California and the southwestern quarter of the country. Clearly, as we get further into the season, the potential for elevated fire danger increases as do the risks to employees and the public.

Our strategic and tactical decisions will be guided by operational risk management principles in every situation. These principles include:

- Identifying, understanding, and communicating risks at every level
- Accepting no unnecessary risks
- Accepting necessary risks only when the benefits outweigh the costs
- Making risk decisions at the appropriate levels

Used appropriately, these principles will help reduce unnecessary exposures to wildland fire personnel and will help ensure that firefighter and public safety are at the forefront of everything we do.

The NPS has one of the best wildland fire teams in the world and our primary wildland fire goal in 2014 is NO FIREFIGHTER LOST. All of us have a responsibility to ensure this goal is achieved.

2014 Direction to Wildland Fire Leadership

The magnitude of a wildfire season has historically been measured against the 10-year average for numbers of wildfires reported and acres burned across the United States. In 2013, wildfires reported, acres burned, and structures lost all remained below this average. However, firefighter fatalities more than doubled our 10 year average with the loss of 34 individuals. This tragic loss is a stark reminder that risk is not strictly a function of numbers and statistics but of human interaction with our working environment, our awareness, and our ability to mitigate potentially dangerous situations.

As the 2014 season approaches, drought grips the western states and indications point to a high potential for extreme burning conditions, it is important to remember some basic tenets of wildland fire management:

- Be prepared with a well-trained, qualified workforce and a clear, up-to-date plan for responding to wildfires;
- Acknowledge risks and actively mitigate them in order to minimize their effect;
- Stress cooperation and communication between agencies, bureaus, states, tribes, partners, and interested publics;
- Actively participate in incident briefings and utilize a review/lessons learned process to improve and praise actions.

Specific expectation of agency administrators and fire managers as they prepare for the upcoming 2014 fire season also include the following:

- ***Firefighter and public safety is a core value that governs every decision and activity.***
- ***Understand and embrace the guiding principles*** set forth in the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.
- ***Understand your roles and responsibilities and ensure your staffs understand and implement their responsibilities*** as defined by your respective Fire Management Planning, the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, and the 2014 Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations Guide (Red Book), or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Wildland Fire and Aviation Program Management and Operations Guide (Blue Book). Executive leadership (Chief or Director) may offer additional guidance regarding your roles and responsibilities as an agency administrator.
- ***Be engaged; reach out to your interagency partners and stakeholders to ensure they are also appropriately involved.*** Federal, tribal, state, and local interagency coordination and cooperation are essential during all three phases of the fire season—pre-season planning, during a wildfire incident, and post- fire and fire season reviews.
- ***Collaborate to set realistic expectations and develop practical, risk-informed decisions and approaches.*** The decisions we make and the approaches we develop should be reached collaboratively with our partners and in thoughtful consideration to the needs of communities and the assets on which they depend. We must share the associated risks—not transfer the risk to others.

- ***Learn from others and share what you learn.*** Ensure that a review process is utilized to examine what did and did not work; seek suggestions for improvement. Learn from others who have had similar incidents, apply those lessons learned, and hold those responsible for follow through.
- ***Involve your chain of command at the earliest opportunity.*** Timely, complete reporting of fire activity and emerging issues are essential to maintaining effective communication. Follow the established reporting process, and report potential issues of national concern through your Agency/Bureau Director or Chief.
- ***Keep our publics informed.*** Managing risk is enhanced through sharing of information on our decisions and actions from the very beginning of an incident. Regular, reoccurring dialogue using communication tools fit to the audience builds an understanding of our decisions and trust in our performance.

Agency leadership will schedule briefings as issues arise and the preparedness levels rise to 4 and 5. A key purpose of these briefings will be to maintain situational awareness and identify issues that may need national support. We want to assure line managers and the fire organization that we will provide you support throughout the fire season.

Finally, our success will be defined by how well we meet our obligations and by how efficiently we use our resources and the management tools available to us. By keeping our employees and the public safe from harm or loss, effectively suppressing unwanted fire, and by doing everything we can to improve the health of our landscapes, we will be successful.

Thank you for your leadership, engagement, continued commitment, and service to preparing for and protecting our nation against wildfire.

Thomas L. Tidwell, Chief
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