



# United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE  
Washington D.C. 20240



In Reply Refer to:  
FWS/ANRS-NRCP/074793

## Memorandum

To: Regional Directors, Interior Regions 1 – 12

From: Principal Deputy Director  
Exercising the Delegated Authority of the Director  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Subject: 2021 Leaders Intent for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Wildland Fire Management

Over the past year, together, we have endured a life experience, the likes of which have not been seen for generations. The Coronavirus-19 (COVID-19) pandemic coupled with a historic wildland fire year is something we will never forget. Fortunately, thanks to the professionalism and adaptability of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) fire management program, we overcame a significant number of COVID-19 obstacles in the wildland fire environment. What our team did to redeem the Service's responsibilities to the American public, our families, and each other, under unbelievable circumstances, was incredible.

In 2020, the extreme conditions caused thousands of evacuations, homes and infrastructure loss, and tragically the fatalities of 11 people in Oregon and 34 people in California. The wildland firecommunity suffered the heartbreaking loss of 12 of its own. One loss is too many and I want to recognize the safe and efficient Service fire management operations that were employed resulting in no serious accidents, injuries, or deaths to Service personnel. The number of minor injuries associated with fire management actions continues to remain low due to excellent leadership and attention to "SAFETY FIRST and SAFETY ALWAYS".

As we enter the 2021 wildland fire year, I am aware of your diligent work to continue preparedness, fire readiness, and fuels management activities amid the challenges of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I ask all of you to remain vigilant in our efforts to reduce the spread as we are hopeful and yearning for a return to normalcy. Obtaining the COVID-19 vaccine and continuing to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance is our best chance for our communities and workplaces to return to normal. If you havenot already done so, please review your state's vaccination plan and, depending on your eligibility and your risk factors, I encourage you to be vaccinated.

Participation in vaccination programs remains voluntary. It should be noted, however, the CDC has recognized vaccinated individuals may travel more safely and with reduced quarantine requirements. This alone will provide needed flexibility to vaccinated wildland fire personnel throughout this fire year.

While there are no one-size-fits all approaches to maintaining mental health, it is important that you find ways or obtain help to manage your physical and mental well-being. A healthy, balanced lifestyle weaves the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of a person's life. They're all interconnected and some aspects might weigh more heavily than others. In the big picture, these aspects support dimensions of resilience, which is just another way of thinking about how you're able to bounce back and adapt to change during and after fire season. The Service's [Peer Support Program](#) is available to assist all employees facing challenging or difficult times. Contact [peersupport@fws.gov](mailto:peersupport@fws.gov).

While our focus is protecting ourselves, families, colleagues, partners, and the people in the communities we serve from wildfire and COVID-19 alike, the commitment to strengthen the quality of our work environment is second to none. For too long, inequities, sexual harassment, and other forms of harassment have persisted in the federal workforce. These types of behaviors have no place in the Service. While many within the wildland fire community have been steadfast in ending harassment, we have room to improve. Every one of us is responsible for creating a work environment where all are treated with dignity and respect. In 2021, we are taking new actions to reduce harassment of all forms. We are providing formal training to ensure everyone has the tools for improving work experiences for all employees.

Creating a work environment where all are welcome is crucial as we strive to bring the current wildland fire workforce transformation to fruition. The Department of the Interior is committed to strengthening this workforce and the Service is leading the way. As we bring new and returning employees into the workplace, I am comforted by the proven track record of safety and professionalism within the Service wildland fire program. I want you to know I am proud of your professionalism and commitment to the Service fire management program. Please keep up the good work and be safe.

Thank you.