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Subject: Chief's Letter of Intent for Wildland Fire - 2021

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

Last year's record-setting acreage, intensity, and duration of wildfire activity, layered onto the backdrop of COVID-19, tested our commitment to service and safety as never before. What you did in 2020, to care for your families and each other under unimaginable circumstances, can't be overstated. Particularly considering the challenges of 2020, I see our success as remarkable. Our core values of safety, diversity, conservation, interdependence, and service carried us through our most challenging experiences. These values continue to inspire our work and public service.

Our commitment to improving the wildland fire system remains unchanged for 2021. Part of this commitment is to consistently apply our lessons from 2020 as we manage for COVID-19 in fire preparation and response. We will continue to use the foundational risk management practices that enabled success in 2020, including consistent mask use, small dispersed fire camps, remote incident management, enhanced safety protocols in our logistical contracts, and continued COVID-19 screening and testing of firefighters.

Just as in 2020, in our incident response strategies and tactics, we will commit responders to operations where we understand the risks of the fire environment and the virus as best as we can. In addition, we will commit responders to operations where they can be most successful, with the least exposure necessary to meet reasonable objectives.

Like you, I am heartened to see fewer COVID-19 cases and increases in vaccinations. However, I ask all of us to remain vigilant in our mask use, hand washing and social distancing even as we are hopeful and yearning for a return to normalcy. We owe it to ourselves, our loved ones, and each other to continue using best practices to help end the pandemic.

As we maintain our keen focus on protecting our colleagues, partners, and the people in the communities we serve, our Forest Service commitment to maintain and strengthen the quality of our work environment is the ultimate demonstration of our devotion to safety. While wildland firefighters are aware of the risks associated with fighting fires, there are other risks, harms, and dangers we must address to fully ensure the safety and high performance of our firefighting workforce. For far too long, sexual harassment and other forms of harassment have persisted in our ranks. These types of behaviors have no place in our workplace and must stop. While many within the fire community have been steadfast in ending harassment, we have significant room to improve. Our Agency Code and Commitments of treating everyone with respect, empowering one another, investing in relationships, modeling integrity, protecting one another, and learning from mistakes are more than just words on a page. They are actions by which we live.



In 2021, we are taking new actions to reduce harassment of all forms and to live our Values and Commitments. We are expanding readiness reviews to include setting expectations for a harassment free environment. We are providing formal training to ensure everyone has the tools for improving work experiences for all firefighters. And we are holding regular and deliberate discussions at fire camp and in-briefings on expectations for maintaining a safe and respectful work environment. In addition, leadership expectations and resulting accountability for maintaining a safe and respectful work environment will be strengthened and clarified in letters of delegation to Incident Commanders. Until all forms of harassment and discrimination are erased from our Agency, our deep commitment to safety will never be fully realized. Every single one of us is responsible for creating a work environment where all are treated with dignity and respect.

I know our Wildland Firefighters face extreme challenges to their physical and mental resilience as they continuously navigate complex situations, spend time away from family and focus on high performance. This also requires preparation. Our commitment to a safe and resilient workforce means sustaining physical and mental well-being as well as getting help for yourself and supporting colleagues who may be experiencing extreme stress or harmful mental health issues. I urge you to familiarize yourself with the support provided through the Forest Service [Employee Assistance Program](#). The [Preparedness Guide for Firefighters and their Families](#) and the companion [Reset Guide](#) are additional resources to build resiliency by acknowledging and addressing some of the hazards and risks associated with wildland firefighting and all hazard responses. Please use these guides. They were created to support the health and well-being of all responders.

As always, we remain anchored to the Cohesive Strategy vision: *To safely and effectively extinguish fire when needed; use fire where allowable; manage our natural resources; and as a nation, to live with wildland fire.* Its three goals of creating resilient landscapes, fire-adapted communities, and safe and effective risk-based wildfire response continue to guide us. Prioritizing fuels treatments in the highest risk places is one of the most climate-smart actions we continue to take to protect communities and landscapes and create places for firefighters to work with reduced hazards. As the 2021 fire year unfolds, we will continue to use all the tools we have, including prescribed fire, mechanical treatments, and wildland fire, to meet our objectives. We will capitalize on our interdependence to share resources in meeting our goals; employ risk management practices to elevate our decision making; leverage new technology; and recommit ourselves to excellent land stewardship and standing up for one another. In 2021, let our drive to improve the condition of our Nation's forests and grasslands only be outmatched by our commitment to one another in creating a workplace that provides for both physical and psychological safety.

I want to thank each of you for your dedication and commitment to service and duty.

Sincerely,



VICTORIA CHRISTIANSEN
Chief