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**File Code:** 5100

**Date:** March 20, 2017

**Subject:** Chief's Letter of Intent for Wildland Fire - 2017

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

Responding to fire continues to be among our highest risk and exposure work. As in 2016, our expectation continues to be for *all* of us involved in fire response to focus our efforts intently on the decisions we make as agency administrators, incident managers and individual responders.

This year, we must strengthen our commitment to ***implement strategies and tactics that commit responders only to operations where and when they can be successful, and under conditions where important values actually at risk are protected with the least exposure necessary while maintaining relationships with the people we serve.*** We expect that during such periods protecting lives of responders is the objective – we don't expect and we won't allow responders to risk their lives attempting the improbable. Each of us must remain committed to "*stop, think and talk*" before "*acting*" in any circumstance that feels like it may represent unnecessary exposure.

I appreciate your support and commitment working toward those goals, openness to talk about the issues that impede us and your help to resolve those issues that keep us from making the best informed decisions to minimize risk and exposure. I expect us to continue to be aggressive implementing tactics that are necessary and have a high probability of success; to accept when all we can do is point protection, until the fuels or weather change. I also expect us to be aggressive recognizing when tactics are unnecessary or will have no effect and only increase the exposure of our fire responders and pilots.

Thank you for making the most of the Life First engagement sessions last year. Some themes that emerged from these discussions included communication both on and off the fireline, driving to and from fire and all work assignments, fire mop up and the use of aircraft, especially in response to fire. We have room for improvement in these four areas and this year I'm asking you to focus efforts toward addressing these concerns. It takes all of us to learn together as we significantly increase the odds that everyone goes home safely each day. I invite you to watch this video to learn more about what we learned from the Life First sessions last year: <https://youtu.be/YAoR2bCEEbY>

Our Safety Journey continues this year combining Life First and safety journey efforts to strengthen collaboration within our agency, with our partners and local communities. The intent is to build on our previous work and continue to learn more about what will improve our wildland fire systems, and work environment and bring everyone home safely every day.



The interaction between fire, our partners and public is evolving and changing but our mission of sustaining the health, diversity and productivity of our Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations remains the same. We know that our wildfire systems including environmental, social and financial factors, continue to be more complex across the nation and we are convinced that continual learning and adaptation are key to our success.

We will continue to strive to create a workplace that is inclusive and safe where employees feel valued and their voices are both heard and respected regardless of the circumstances and pressures of our work. I am very proud of all our employees' service, leadership, thoughtful decision-making and resilience through our challenges and successes. I thank all employees for the great work you do.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Thomas L. Tidwell". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "L".

THOMAS L. TIDWELL  
Chief