



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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IN REPLY REFER TO:

10.A (2400)

To: Regional Directors

From: Director

Subject: Leader's Intent: Wildland Fire 2023

Change continues to be a theme across many areas of the National Park Service (NPS). In wildland fire, climate change has focused the attention of partners and constituents on our wildland fire program's ability to address the challenges posed by longer and more intense wildfire years. The solutions to these challenges require significant changes to fundamental components of our wildland fire program, from a new job series, to re-emphasizing planning and ensuring partnerships with internal and external stakeholders are established and fostered. The NPS fire program has been working to address these challenges directly. I remain committed to supporting NPS wildland fire staff in this work and celebrate the work they do to manage every wildland fire while protecting people, park resources, and local communities.

As our wildland fire programs prepare for the peak-season, we are reminded that wildfire and its impacts know no boundaries. The devastating fires in Canada have burned homes and displaced residents and the smoke from these fires is affecting millions of people in the northeastern United States. NPS wildland fire personnel are currently deployed to Canada to support our international neighbor in wildfire suppression efforts.

We continue to work with the Department of the Interior (DOI) Office of Wildland Fire, partner bureaus within the DOI, the United States Department of Agriculture, U.S. Forest Service, and the Office of Personnel Management, to implement a new occupational series for wildland fire personnel. That work is ongoing, and we expect the release of NPS guidance on the use of newly developed position descriptions over the next several months. The implementation of this organizational change is critical. I recognize this will place an additional workload on human resource and fire management staff just as the western fire season kicks off.

The NPS wildland fire program is establishing a firefighter health and wellness program. This important effort is being led by the U.S. Public Health officers in the NPS Division of Fire and Aviation Management. This is a critical step in formalizing and strengthening support to our wildland fire personnel and involves robust coordination with our interagency partners as well as alignment with the Wellness and Resilience program in the NPS Office of Risk Management. The wildland fire program will approach wellness from a holistic perspective with the goal to support firefighters in the physically, mentally, and emotionally taxing work they undertake. We should also not forget that overall health and wellness is demonstrated by a workplace safe from harassment and discrimination. I have the utmost respect for the fire response personnel across

the country who make sacrifices every day to keep people and park resources safe. We must make every effort to ensure our employees are respected, included, safe, and engaged.

This year marks the 15-year anniversary of the loss of NPS firefighter Andy Palmer in the Dutch Creek Incident, the 10-year anniversary of the Yarnell Hill Fire where 19 of the Granite Mountain Hotshots were killed, and the 5-year anniversary of the loss of Arrowhead Hotshot Brian Hughes on the Ferguson Fire near Yosemite National Park. These anniversaries are a stark reminder of the inherent risks posed in wildland fire management activities. We must remain diligent in risk mitigation activities, including reviewing, updating, and where relevant, practicing medical response plans, ensuring there is clarity and common understanding of the actions we will take when we implement and respond to wildland fire incidents. It is critical that we pay attention to the foundational basics to accomplish safe and effective fire management actions. Elements such as vehicle inspections, job hazard analyses, medical standards program and incident qualifications card administration are all critical in our fire management programs and they deserve our attention and time to ensure the safety of our fire management personnel.

We continue to enhance the wildland fire program by investing in our workforce, updating strategies, and leveraging partnerships. Additional funding and legislation, such as the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), demonstrate our important commitment to, and investment in, our wildland fire management program, its people, and the landscapes we steward.

My expectation is that we conduct additional fuels treatments to reduce wildfire risk and the potential adverse impacts from wildfires. Fire management plans need to be current, compliance work completed, and response modules adequately and appropriately staffed. Much progress has been made to identify and fill those programmatic positions that play a critical role in making the NPS wildland fire program a success. Planners, human resources specialists, compliance and contracting staff, and communication and education specialist positions have all been filled across the organization over the past year. It's critical that we now focus our attention on increasing our operational wildland fire capacity by filling all funded positions as soon as possible, attract and retain employees and conduct fuels management treatments.

We will continue to use all the tools available, the best science and evidence to help guide our fuels treatment prioritization. We will place emphasis on those treatments that reduce severe fire effects and prepare park and neighboring communities to withstand a wildfire with a reduced threat to life and loss of property. These actions will help us to further our progress toward the vision of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, which is, *“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.”*

In closing, let's remember there is a lot of change happening around us; some rapidly, while other changes take time and extensive coordination to implement. We must capitalize on the opportunities presented to us as we strive to do our best for our employees and the American public we proudly serve.

Cc: Division Chief, Fire and Aviation Management
Branch Chief, Wildland Fire