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**File Code:** 1300**Date:****Route To:****Subject:** Chief's Letter of Intent for the 2025 Wildfire Year**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, Deputy Chiefs and Washington Office Directors

Our dedication to service, along with our connection to the land and local communities, is what makes our agency strong. This is exemplified by our employees who work tirelessly to reduce wildfire risk and respond to wildfires and disasters. As we continue this critical agency work this year, and in light of the many hazards we face, I expect each of you to prioritize safety as you perform your jobs.

Reducing the risk of wildfire is a key component of our wildfire strategies. I will continue to support your collaborative work with local governments, states, tribes, landowners, industry, and conservation partners to develop strategies that reflect local needs and priorities in our fire risk reduction work. Continuing science-based strategies, including the potential operational delineations (PODS), is critical to ensure we do the right work in the right places. We will also continue to work with our partners who hold critical agreements for risk mitigation, including shared stewardship agreements with states and the National Alliance of Forest Owners (NAFO) Fuel Break Memorandum of Understanding. Active forest management, coupled with our continued focus on prevention, and continuing our crucial hazardous fuels reduction efforts, will make the difference needed to restore resilient landscapes, especially in high-risk areas.

There are inherent risks in suppressing wildfires. I expect utilization of all available tools, technology, and experience to ensure a risk-informed response. However, this will never mitigate all the risks associated with the work that you do. I want each and every unit to take a tactical pause during your pre-season training, cooperator meetings, and throughout the season as needed, to acknowledge the challenges you face in focusing on the job at hand, rather than the greater uncertainty around us. While I recognize there are many changes taking place in our Agency, I want your mind to be as focused as possible while in the midst of fire season.

Fire seasons have been trending longer with more extreme fire behavior, coupled with unprecedented demand for personnel and resources, which has required us to adapt over the past several years. With that in mind, we will continue to focus on safe, aggressive initial attack. We will make appropriate risk informed efforts to fully suppress small fires before they become large, complex incidents to ensure we can protect lives, property, valuable timber and natural resources. It is critical that we suppress fires as swiftly as possible to minimize the amount of fireline exposure and be ready for the next ignition. This means employing direct attack tactics when and where feasible to minimize fire size and time to containment when safe and practicable to do so. As always, we will use all available risk-management tools and deploy resources appropriately depending on resource availability, time of year, communities, infrastructure, natural resources, weather, drought, and wildfire activity.

With our current fire conditions, we need to use our firefighting capacity as efficiently as possible. There may be very limited opportunities for in-season prescribed fire or the use of natural ignitions to safely reduce future wildfires outlined in the Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations (Red Book). We will also use those procedures in Preparedness Level 3. If those opportunities exist, they should be well understood by partners and key stakeholders through open, collaborative preseason and ongoing dialogue, as well as risk shared with both Regional Foresters and the National Headquarters. We will continue to





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innovate, using technology for fire detection and suppression such as Uncrewed Aerial Systems (UAS), satellite surveillance, cameras, tracking, and remote sensing, to increase efficiency and accuracy while reducing exposure to firefighters.

To bring added focus and reduce unnecessary distraction during the period when we need to prioritize wildfire response, I expect leaders from our National Headquarters to the Districts to:

- Eliminate barriers and unnecessary procedures that impede resource capability or mobilization.
- Prioritize employees' ability to maintain or update their fireline qualifications (Red Cards) and make red-carded personnel available for fire assignments.
- Roster Agency Administrators to be available to fill critical needs on fires, as well as to mentor, support, and fill in where new Line Officers have limited fire qualifications.
- Ensure adequate, timely contracting and agreement support, and provide clear direction that fire response is the priority.
- Actively manage the stress and fatigue of all employees engaged in fire response.
- Adjust program output and service expectations as wildfire and all-hazard response grows.
- Continue to prioritize wildfire risk reduction for the communities we serve by conducting vegetation management projects where capacity remains to do so.

I am sincerely proud of the men and women that make up our wildfire program, from firefighters, fire management leaders, and agency administrators to dispatchers, support staff and all that participate on Incident Management Teams, including those additional staff that step in to cover other duties as needed. I appreciate your passion, dedication, and desire to serve. Your safety, the safety of all fire personnel, and safety of the public is my highest priority.

Your role in ensuring another successful fire year is crucial. Thank you for your service and commitment. I am honored to serve as your Chief and look forward to meeting many of you in the field soon.

THOMAS M. SCHULTZ, JR.  
Chief

