



USDA Forest Service National Fire Leadership Council Briefing Paper

Date: 10/31/2017

Topic: Use of Naturally Ignited Wildfire to Create Resilient Landscapes

Issue: Leaders' Intent for Naturally Ignited Wildfires

- **Background:** The vision of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (Cohesive Strategy) 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.”* To meet the three key components identified by the strategy (Resilient Landscapes, Fire Adapted Communities, Safe and Effective Wildfire Response), the USDA Forest Service’s Chief, Senior Fire Leaders, and National Fire leadership Council have all identified a need to improve the Wildland Fire System. Additionally, the 2009 Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (GIFWFMP) encourages the use of wildland fire to meet resource objectives, and states a preference for the management of natural ignitions in meeting the role of fire as an ecological process (pg. 11). The Chief’s “Elevator Speech” (August 2017) included a call to action specifically around the use of wildland fire: “It is time for our agency to make a shift in how we engage and manage wildland fire. Fires are more complex, fire seasons are growing longer and the wildland urban interface is growing. We manage landscapes that have evolved to need fire ecologically. Therefore, we should use risk management principles to help use wildland fire to achieve desired ecological conditions where possible and where it makes sense.”

Key Points:

- Forest Service leadership acknowledges a need for “more fire on the landscape” (wildfire and prescribed fire) to meet the goals of the Cohesive Strategy.
- The NFLC has developed a “More Fire on the Landscape” work group, which is currently identifying ways to encourage line officers and fire managers to meet this goal. Some of the issues/challenges identified include a need for specific training, short/long term planning, social license, and clear Leaders’ Intent.
- Using naturally ignited wildfires when conditions are appropriate is critical to achieving resilient landscapes in a timely, efficient, and effective manner.
- There is a consistent theme across Regions/Forests most successful in using naturally ignited wildfires to meet landscape scale restoration goals. That theme is a clearly articulated leaders’ intent around these opportunities. Intentional direction from leadership to line officers and fire management officers expressing an expectation that all naturally ignited wildfires will be evaluated for their potential to meet restoration objectives will incentivize these decision makers by shifting our cultural response to wildfires and demonstrating shared risk upwards.
- There is inconsistent messaging (and therefore understanding) across regions regarding support for using naturally ignited wildfires to meet restoration goals.

Recommendation:

Senior Fire Leaders should utilize multiple messaging tools to articulate a clear, nationally aligned Leaders' Intent to employees (especially line officers and fire management officers) around the use of naturally ignited wildfire - when and where appropriate as directed by Federal Wildland Fire Policy - to meet the goals of the Cohesive Strategy. Opportunities exist within the annual "Chief's Letter", and/or standalone communication tools at the national/regional level. Utilize the NFLC "More Fire on the Landscape" work group to assist as needed.

Possible Intention Statement:

"Consistent with the goals of the Cohesive Strategy and as directed by the 2001 Review and Update of the 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, using naturally ignited wildfires when and where conditions are appropriate is critical and encouraged to achieve resilient landscapes in a timely, efficient, and effective manner. To be successful, Regional Foresters will provide intentional direction to line officers and fire management officers expressing an expectation that all naturally ignited wildfires will be evaluated for their potential to meet local restoration objectives. Forest- and district-level decision makers' actions will establish procedures to evaluate when appropriate opportunities arise and will be critical in shifting our cultural response to wildfires from risk-averse to opportunistic, and will demonstrate a shared commitment to meeting this agency priority."

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