

Use of Aerial Fire Retardant on NFS lands - 2022

We are in the process of updating the decision on and consultations for the Nationwide Aerial Retardant Program, based on issues and changes identified in the 2020 Supplemental Information Report.

- The draft Supplemental EIS, which updates the 2011 EIS, was published on 11 February 2022. We anticipate completing a final Supplemental EIS and new Record of Decision later this year, to be implemented beginning in 2023. Therefore the direction provided by the 2011 decision, and outlined in the Implementation Guide (version May 2019) remains in effect for the 2022 fire season, and until further notice.
- The Biological Opinions (BOs) associated with the 2011 decision expired on 1 Jan 2022.
 - We have a new (1 March 2022) BO from NOAA Fisheries, addressing anadromous threatened, endangered, and proposed aquatic species. We will be operating under this opinion for the 2022 fire season and future fire seasons.
 - We anticipate receiving a new BO from Fish and Wildlife Service, covering the majority of threatened, endangered, and proposed species on all NF units, by early summer this year. Until we receive that opinion we will continue to operate under the provisions of the 2011 BO and addendums. Provisions from the new BO will be provided to the affected Forests biologists so that they can inform fire managers as needed in 2022.
 - National-level Avoidance Area maps are produced prior to the fire season (by 1 April). Therefore, changes based on the 2022 consultations will be mapped at the national level for the 2023 fire season.
- Intrusion (entry of aerial fire retardant into avoidance areas) reporting remains the responsibility of the agency administrator. This includes reporting on use of exceptions for applying aerial retardant in avoidance areas, which must be specifically documented as described in the Implementation Guide.

All documents referred to above, as well as Biological Assessments supporting the new Biological Opinions, can be found on the Interagency Wildland Fire chemicals policy and guidance website <https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/fire/chemicals>. That website also includes links to:

- Avoidance Area maps
- Implementation Guide for Aerial Application of Fire Retardant (v. May 2019)
- Retardant Intrusion Reporting Tool, including the link to request access to the tool.