WILDERNESS FIRE MANAGEMENT

PLANNING CHECKLIST

FOR FOREST SERVICE UNITS

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to provide wilderness and fire managers with a checklist of wilderness considerations that should be addressed when revising land management plans and conducting fire management planning for Forest Service wilderness areas, as well as suggested resources and training. The checklist is divided into three parts:

Part A provides a list of broad considerations that are important to wilderness management objectives in the unit’s *land management plan*.

Part B provides a list of specific considerations that are important to wilderness management objectives in *fire management planning*.

Part C provides a list of *resources and training* that may enhance the efficiency of the fire management planning process and the degree to which both fire and wilderness management objectives are met during a wildfire response.

**KEY TERMS**

Land Management Plan (LMP). A broad, programmatic document or set of documents that guides all resource management activities on a unit of the National Forest System and prescribes desired conditions, goals and objectives, and standards and guidelines. An LMP is a binding NEPA decision. Some units have a wilderness stewardship plan, as an amendment or appendix to the LMP, which may contain more specific wilderness fire management direction.

Fire Management Planning (FMP). A process that identifies, integrates, and coordinates all wildland fire management activities to achieve the goals and objectives of an approved LMP. FMP is supplemented by operational plans. See *Spatial Fire Planning*.

Spatial Fire Planning (SFP). A fire management planning process that visually represents LMP direction. This process utilizes WFDSS and the FMRS to guide management responses to wildfire. SFP meets the fire management planning requirements of the Federal Wildland Fire Policy and replaced narrative Forest Service fire management plans in 2016.

Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS). A comprehensive, web-based tool designed to assess the situation, analyze risk, define implementation actions, and document wildfire management decisions. WFDSS replaced all other wildfire management decision support tools in 2009 and is now the primary system for incident-level wildfire management. WFDSS is spatially oriented and integral to SFP, and it is supported by the FMRS.

Fire Management Reference System (FMRS). A collection of unit-level plans, guides, and other documents required to support local fire management, such as aviation, operations, dispatch, and fire danger operating plans. Following the Forest Service transition from fire management plans to SFP in 2016, the FMRS should also include applicable minimum requirements analyses (MRDGs) as well as any other wilderness-specific information or guidance.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Forest Service fire management planning information and guidance and FMRS filing directions can be found at: <http://fsweb.wo.fs.fed.us/fire/fmp>.

Agency policies, guidelines, examples, and other relevant resources can be found in the Fire Management Toolbox at: [www.wilderness.net/toolboxes](http://www.wilderness.net/toolboxes).

**PART A: Land Management Plan**

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| **Topic** | **Consideration(s)** | **Check** |
| 1. DESIRED CONDITIONS | Are the desired conditions in the LMP related to fire consistent with the mandate to preserve wilderness character prescribed by the Wilderness Act? |  |
| Does the LMP promote the preservation of natural conditions, such that the wilderness *“generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable?”* |  |
| Does the LMP promote the exercise of restraint, such that the wilderness is *“an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man?”*  **Note:** Desired conditions are best achieved (wilderness character is best preserved) when the effects of wildfire as a natural disturbance agent are observed and not the effects of fire management activities. |  |
| 2. GOALS & OBJECTIVES | Does the LMP address the natural role of fire in wilderness and recognize the effects of deferring risk when natural processes are suppressed or altered? |  |
| Does the LMP consider the full range of management responses to unplannedignitions (wildfire) in the context of wilderness stewardship objectives? |  |
| For areas in which a full range of management responses to wildfire is not available, if any, does the LMP document the rationale and evaluation?  **Note:** If the LMP fails to address the natural role of fire in wilderness, recognize the effects of deferring risk, and consider the full range of management responses to wildfire, a revision may be necessary. |  |

**PART B: Fire Management Planning**

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| **Topic** | **Consideration(s)** | **Check** |
| 1. FMP REVIEW & REVISION | Does the FMRS identify a wilderness staff role and schedule for the development, review, and revision of fire management planning annually? |  |
| 2. WILDERNESS ACT (P.L. 88-577) | Is fire management planning consistent with relevant statutes from the Wilderness Act of 1964 and/or subsequent wilderness legislation, as applicable?  WILDERNESS ACT OF 1964  Section 2(a):  *“...administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character...”*  Section 2(c):  *“…an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man…”*  *“…an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence…, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable…”*  Section 4(b):  *“…each agency administering any such area shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area…”*  Section 4(c):  *“…except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act, there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.”*  Section 4(d):  *“…such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire…, subject to such conditions as the Secretary deems desirable.”*  **Note:** The Wilderness Act text may be included by reference. |  |

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|  | | Does fire management planning recognize that administrative exceptions to the prohibitions identified in Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act must:  1) be **necessary** for the administration of the area as wilderness, and  2) have the **least** adverse effect on wilderness character? | |  | |
| 3. WILDERNESS POLICY | | Does fire management planning specifically reference relevant wilderness policy?  FOREST SERVICE WILDERNESS POLICY  FSM 2324.21 – Objectives:  The objectives of fire management in wilderness are to:  1. Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness.  2. Reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.  FSM 2324.22 – Policy:  1. Two types of prescribed fires may be approved for use within wilderness: those ignited by lightning and allowed to burn under prescribed conditions and those ignited by qualified Forest Service officers.  2. No fire may be ignited or allowed to burn without documented, preplanned, specified conditions.  3. Document specific objectives, standards, and guidelines for the control of wildfire and the use of prescribed fire within each wilderness (FSM 5100, 5150, and 5190) in a forest plan or, where the forest planning process has not been completed, in either an interim wilderness management or fire management area plan. Document specific direction for fire program implementation in the forest fire management action plan (FSH 5109.19).  4. Suppress all wildfires within wilderness in accordance with the direction FSM 5130.  5. Fire ignited by lightning may be permitted to burn if prescribed in an approved plan (FSM 2324 and 5150).  6. Forest Service managers may ignite a prescribed fire in wilderness to reduce unnatural buildups of fuels only if necessary to meet at least one of the wilderness fire management objectives set forth in FSM 2324.21 and if all of the following conditions are met:  a. The use of prescribed fire or other fuel treatment measures outside of wilderness is not sufficient to achieve fire management objectives within wilderness.  b. An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists has evaluated and recommended the proposed use of prescribed fire.  c. The interested public has been involved appropriately in the decision.  d. Lightning-caused fires cannot be allowed to burn because they will pose serious threats to life and/or property within wilderness or to life, property, or natural resources outside of wilderness.  7. Do not use prescribed fire in wilderness to benefit wildlife, maintain vegetative types, improve forage production, or enhance other resource values. Although these additional effects may result from a decision to use prescribed fire, use fire in wilderness only to meet wilderness fire management objectives.  8. Do not use management ignited fire to achieve wilderness fire management objectives where lightning-caused fires can achieve them.  **Note:** FSM 5140 was revised in 2014 to recognize only one type of prescribed fire: fire ignited for management purposes. And, all other wildland fires, regardless of cause, are called “wildfires” in fire policy. | |  | |
| Does fire management planning specifically require all fire management activities to be conducted in a manner consistent with wilderness policy?  FOREST SERVICE WILDERNESS POLICY  FSM 2324.23 – Fire Management Activities  Conduct all fire management activities within wilderness in a manner compatible with overall wilderness management objectives. Give preference to using methods and equipment that cause the least:  1) Alteration of the wilderness landscape.  2) Disturbance to the land surface.  3) Disturbance to visitor solitude.  4) Reduction of visibility during periods of visitor use.  5) Adverse effect on other air quality related values.  **Note:** When addressing smoke, consider that smoke from a natural fire does not constitute pollution or adverse impact to visibility. Natural fires should not be limited to protect visibility in wilderness, and natural smoke, by definition, does not adversely affect any AQRV. Impacts to human health from smoke (NAAQS), however, should be considered when making fire management decisions. | |  | |
|  | | Does fire management planning specifically reference relevant wilderness policy for BAER?  FOREST SERVICE WILDERNESS POLICY  FSM 2324.43b – Emergency Burned Area Rehabilitation  Permit emergency burned area rehabilitation only if necessary to prevent an unnatural loss of the wilderness resource or to protect life, property, and other resource values outside of wilderness.  Normally use hand tools and equipment to install selected land and channel treatments. | |  | |
| 4. LINE OFFICER APPROVAL | | Does the FMRS include documentation of delegation levels for the approval of motorized equipment, mechanical transport, and other prohibited uses?  FOREST SERVICE WILDERNESS POLICY   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | Motorized/Mechanical Request | Decision Authority | | | Default | Emergency | | Chainsaws, Pumps, Other Motorized Equip | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | Aircraft, Air Drop, Motorboat, or Mechanical Transport | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | Helispot Construction | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | Motor Vehicles | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | Prescribed Fire | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | BAER Projects | Regional Forester | Forest Supervisor | | Tractors-Dozers  (Heavy Equipment) | Chief of the  Forest Service | Regional Forester |   **Note:** In some regions, the authority to approve the use of motorized equipment and mechanical transport (and other uses) in “emergencies*”* has been delegated to District Rangers. Check local letters of delegation and regional FSM supplements.Emergencies are **not** exempt from Section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. Also, while all fire is considered to be an emergency, BAER is rarely an emergency and generally should not be regarded as such. | |  | |
| 5. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS | | If applicable, does the FRMS include programmatic MRAs (MRDGs) for prohibited uses?  AND/OR  Does the FRMS include a clear process for determining the “minimum necessary” when prohibited uses are being considered and for reviewing and approving MRAs (MRDGs)? | |  | |
| Does the FMRS include any guidance for documenting and reporting agency authorizations for motorized equipment, mechanical transport, or other prohibited uses in wilderness?  **Note:** All authorizations must be entered into the INFRA Wild database by the data steward. | |  | |
| 6. MULTI-JURISDICTION | | If applicable, does the FMRS include adequate guidance to address multi-jurisdictional issues, identify coordination needs, and facilitate single-unit management to assure consistency across boundaries? | |  | |
| 7. RESOURCE ADVISOR | | Does the FMRS include a process and requirement for the assignment of a wilderness-qualified resource advisor (READ or REAF) or technical specialist (THSP) for any fire that is not contained during initial attack? | |  | |
| 8. RESOURCE CONCERNS | | Does fire management planning address specific wilderness resource concerns, such as the effects of unnatural fire and fire management activities on: wilderness, heritage, wildlife, fisheries, hydrology, soils, invasive species, TES, and unique features of the wilderness? | |  | |
| Does fire management planning address concerns related to recreation and public safety? | |  | |
| 9. FIRE MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES | | Does the FMRS contain operational information that supports conducting all fire management activities in wilderness in a manner compatible with wilderness management objectives?  See examples below. | |  | |
| Does fire management planning describe protection objectives for wilderness resources? | |  | |
| 10. MINIMUM IMPACT STRATEGIES & TACTICS (MIST) | | Does the FMRS include wilderness-specific implementation guidance for MIST?  Does the MIST guidance address applicable Leave No Trace (LNT) principles, and do they specifically state how to employ LNT techniques for hiking, camping, campfires, human waste, and other concerns, including respecting local wildlife and visitors? | |  | |
| 11. HELISPOTS & FIRE CAMPS | | Does fire management planning locate helispots and fire camps outside wilderness, when feasible?  **Note:** It is not always feasible to locate helispots or fire camps outside wilderness. Apply MIST guidelines when identifying locations inside wilderness. | |  | |
| 12. WATER LOCATIONS | | Does fire management planning identify water sources inside and outside wilderness to be avoided for water dips, due to the presence NNIS or other issues? | |  | |
| 13. SPATIAL PLANNING INFORMATION  (WFDSS) | | Wilderness Boundaries | |  | |
| Private In-Holdings & Edge-Holdings | |  | |
| Recreation Developments, Including Trails & Trailheads | |  | |
| Administrative Sites & Facilities | |  | |
| Communication Sites (Existing) | |  | |
| Communication Sites (Possible Temporary) | |  | |
| Assigned Outfitter-Guide Camps | |  | |
| Grazing Allotments & Infrastructure | |  | |
| Dams & Water Diversions | |  | |
| Research or Monitoring Installations | |  | |
| Active Mining Operations | |  | |
| LMP Management Prescriptions | |  | |
| Heritage Assets | |  | |
| Invasive Species Populations | |  | |
| Threatened/Endangered Species Populations | |  | |
| Recent Fire Polygons | |  | |
| Water Sources to Avoid (In & Out of Wilderness) | |  | |
| Potential Helispot Locations (In & Out of Wilderness) | |  | |
| Potential Fire/Spike Camp Locations (In & Out of Wilderness) | |  | |
| 14. NON-SPATIAL PLANNINGINFORMATION (FMRS) | | Wilderness BAER Policy (FSM 2323.43.b) | |  |
| Wilderness Fire Management Policy (FSM 2324.2) | |  |
| Wilderness Helispot Policy (FSM 2324.23) | |  |
| Wilderness Aircraft Use and Air Drop Regs (36 CFR 293) | |  |
| Delegations of Authority for Motor/Mech Use | |  |
| Sample Tractor-Dozer Request | |  |
| Sample Motor/Mech Need & Approval Form | |  |
| Sample Delegation of Authority Letter for Motor/Mech Use | |  |
| Applicable Minimum Requirements Analyses (MRDGs) | |  |
| GO/NO GO Checklists or Emergency Decision Guides | |  |
| LMP or Wilderness Stewardship Plan Direction | |  |
| Wilderness Fire Management Guidelines | |  |
| Wilderness-Specific MIST Guidelines | |  |
| Wilderness Motorized Equipment Use Guidelines | |  |
| Wilderness Tractor-Dozer Guidelines | |  |
| Wilderness READ/REAF Assignment Guidelines | |  |
| Sample Wilderness READ/REAF Report | |  |
| List of Wilderness-Qualified READs/REAFs and THSPs | |  |
| List of Available Crosscut Sawyers | |  |
| List of Available Animal Packers | |  |
| List of Material Resources Available | |  |
| Sample Fire Suppression Rehabilitation Plan | |  |
| Wilderness Fire Information & Education Media | |  |
| Private In-Holder/Edge-Holder Contact Information | |  |
| Outfitter-Guide Contact Information | |  |
| Wilderness Manager & Line Officer Contact Information | |  |

**PART C: Resources & Training**

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| **Topic** | **Resource or Training** | **Check** |
| 1. RESOURCES | Chief’s Letter of Intent – Wildland Fire (Annual) |  |
| Forest Service Fire Season Key Messages (Annual) |  |
| Resource Advisor’s Guide for Wildland Fire (PMS-313) |  |
| Forest Service Fire Management Planning Guide |  |
| WFDSS Spatial Fire Planning Guide |  |
| Integrating Fire Management into LMPs (TG-09) |  |
| Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001) |  |
| Implementing Wildland Fire Management Policy (2009) |  |
| 2. TRAINING | Wilderness Act of 1964, E-Course\* |  |
| Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA), E-Course\* |  |
| Four Cornerstones of Wilderness Stewardship, E-Course\* |  |
| Special Provisions in Wilderness: Fire, E-Course\* |  |
| National, Regional, or Unit Wilderness Training Course\* |  |
| Crosscut Sawyer Training Course |  |
| S-130 Firefighter Training Course |  |
| S-190 Introduction to Wildland Fire Behavior Course |  |
| I-100 Introduction to ICS Course |  |
| I-200 Basic ICS Course |  |
| M-580 Fire in Ecosystem Management Course |  |
| N-9043 Interagency Wilderness Fire Resource Advisor Course |  |

\* Training offered by the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center. For information, visit: <http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/training>.