Wilderness Wildfire Operation Plan
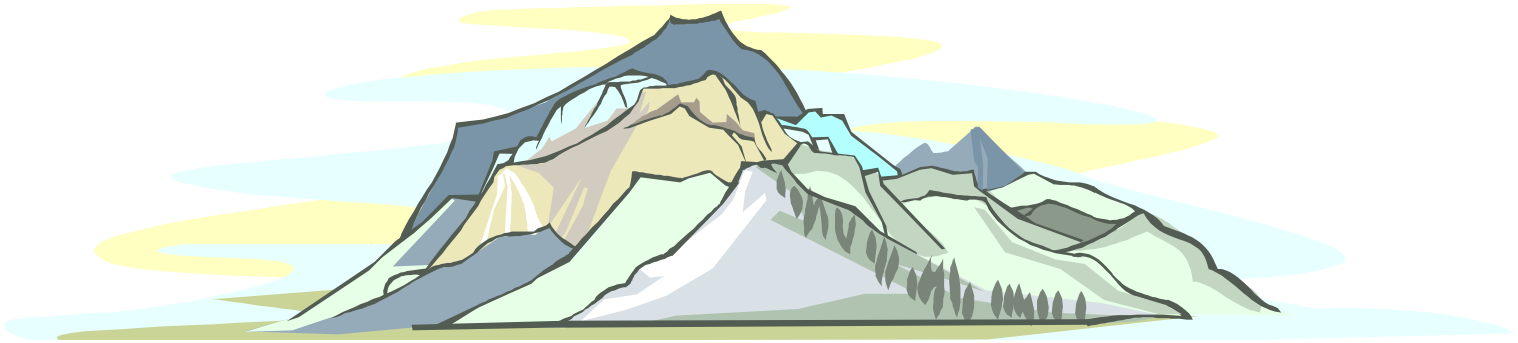# Cohutta Wilderness

APPROVED BY:

_____   _____
FOREST SUPERVISOR   **DATE**

RECOMMENDED BY:

_____   _____
DISTRICT RANGER - CONASAUGA   **DATE**

RECOMMENDED BY:

_____   _____
FOREST FMO   **DATE**

RECOMMENDED BY:

_____   _____
DISTRICT FMO - CONASAUGA   **DATE**

RECOMMENDED BY:

_____   _____
DISTRICT RECREATION STAFF   **DATE**

RECOMMENDED BY:

_____   _____
DISTRICT WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST   **DATE**

USDA FOREST SERVICE – R8 SOUTHERN REGION

CHATTAHOOCHEE-OCONEE NATIONAL FORESTS

CONASAUGA RANGER DISTRICT

2011

Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

THE INTENT OF THIS PLAN IS TO PROVIDE A CENTRALIZED INFORMATION SOURCE FOR INCIDENT COMMANDERS AND DECIDING OFFICIALS REGARDING THE POLICY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGEMENT OF FIRE IN CONGRESSIONALLY DESIGNATED WILDERNESS. Currently, this plan reflects guidance specific to those portions of the **Cohutta Wilderness** within the Chattahoochee National Forest (35,233 acres) and wilderness study areas (363 acres) directly adjacent to the Cohutta Wilderness. In the near future, the goal will be to approach this plan through collaboration with the Cherokee National Forest to incorporate both the Big Frog Wilderness and the Cohutta Wilderness in their entirety.

SNAP SHOT

FMU NUMBER 5
RADIO FREQUENCY: See Operations Plan Communications Guide
GENERAL RISK CATEGORY: Low/Medium
FIRE BEHAVIOR INDICATOR: BI, KBDI
NFDRS WEATHER STATION: Cohutta (COHG1)
ACRES/AGENCY (WILDERNESS): 35,233/Chattahoochee National Forest
ACRES/AGENCY (WILDERNESS STUDY): 363/Chattahoochee National Forest
PREDOMINANT VEGETATION TYPES: *Southern Yellow Pine and Pine/Oak, White Pine and Hemlock, and Upland hardwood.*
UNIT: Conasauga Ranger District
DUTY OFFICER: Conasauga DFMO or designee
IA DISPATCH OFFICE: Georgia Interagency Coordination Center (GA-GIC) or Conasauga Ranger District dispatcher, if contact with GA-GIC is not possible.
IA ASSETS ASSIGNED TO THIS FMU: Local Type III IMT available. Regional Type III helicopter stationed at Glassy Mountain Helibase, but will require approval prior to use in wilderness.
COMMUNITIES ADJACENT OR WITHIN FMU: No private inholdings within the Cohutta Wilderness. Private land abuts the Cohutta Wilderness to the east side. Closest community is the Jones Settlement.
LRMP OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR RESPONSE TO IGNITION: Suppression, Natural ignition use of fire
SPECIAL SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Complex terrain features and remoteness of the Wilderness can impact the effectiveness of radio and cell phone communications. Black Bears occur in most areas of the Wilderness. Also rattlesnakes, stinging insects, and poison ivy.

POLICY

National and regional policy for wilderness management (FSM 2300) and fire management (FSM 2500, 5100) as well as the Chattahoochee-Oconee NFs Land and Resource Management Plan (2004) and Fire Management Plan (2010; updated annually) are the guiding documents for this plan. Wilderness designation and additional direction is included in the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Eastern Wilderness Act/Public Law 93-622 (1975), Public Law 94-268 (1976) and Public Law 99-555 (1986).

The term 'Wildland Fire Use' is no longer being used, but the concepts stated below meet the current policy under 'Use of Wildland Fire'.

Chattahoochee-Oconee SUPPLEMENT (R8-5100-2009-1)

- *5143-<u>Wildland Fire Use</u>*

Authorize implementation of Prescribed Fire Burn Plans (RXBP) and Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) for all complexity levels at Regional and National Preparedness Levels I, II, and III.

Human caused fires require a suppression response as outlined in the Fire Management Plan. The appropriate management response can vary from aggressive initial attack to a more defensive posture based on the fuels, weather, topography, health and safety issues, fire behavior, cost plus loss, and other considerations between the Agency Administrator and the Incident Commander. No human caused wildland fires, including any escaped fire use, will be managed for resource benefits (emphasis added).

Manage natural ignitions for resource benefits are authorized in the Forests Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), Fire Management Plan (FMP). The District Fire Management Officer or acting will prepare a Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) for wildland fire use; the plan will be approved by the agency administrator.

Changes relevant to previous fire management policy as stated in "Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management policy" (2009) are as follows:

- Initial action on human-caused wildfire will be to suppress the fire at the lowest cost with the fewest negative consequences with respect to firefighter and public safety
- A wildland fire may be concurrently managed for one or more objectives and objectives can change as the fire spreads across the landscape. Objectives are affected by changes in fuels, weather, topography; varying social understanding and tolerance; and involvement of other governmental jurisdictions having different missions and objectives
- Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire management decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions

Land and **R**esour**c**e **M**anagement **P**lan **(LRMP)** EMPHASIS **(page 3-8)**

Allow ecological and biological processes to progress naturally with little to no human influence or intervention. Minimum impacts made by those who seek the wilderness as a special place offering opportunities to experience solitude and risk in as primitive surroundings as possible may occur.

Land and **R**esour**c**e **M**anagement **P**lan **(LRMP)** DESIRED CONDITION
(abridged – pages 3-8 through 3-10)

The natural evolving landscape character in wilderness expresses the natural evolution of biophysical features and processes with very limited human intervention. The forest cover is primarily older forests with a continuous canopy, except for occasional gaps created by natural occurrences such as storms, insect or disease outbreak, and fire. Natural ignition fires are permitted to play a natural role when weather, terrain, and external values at risk permit. Management of the area is focused on protecting and preserving the natural environment, natural processes, and heritage properties from human influences.

Natural processes such as ice storms or windstorms, insects, diseases, and lightening fires are the primary influences to vegetation. These processes would periodically remove the canopy and result in large and small areas of young and small trees. The range of canopy breaks includes the common occurrence of small gaps created by individual tree mortality, to frequent insect or disease-killed groups up to approximately one hundred acres, and infrequent large contiguous areas up to several hundred acres caused by storms or wildfire.

These areas have a Scenic Integrity Objective of Very High, which generally provides for ecological change only. Natural change is assumed to be visually acceptable and no active management is directed at moderating visual contrasts. Evidence of human intervention in the appearance of the landscape is minimal and would normally be overlooked by most visitors. Human-caused change may be specifically mitigated to be made less obvious.

Travel and recreation within wilderness is strictly non-motorized. Although open roads may serve as boundaries to the area, its interior includes no open roads. Human access is by non-motorized means only.

Goals and Objectives

Wilderness is different from other public lands, by law and agency policy. Fire management activities in wilderness must be conducted to meet wilderness management goals and objectives. Fire management activities in wilderness are accomplished through preparation and implementation of unit fire management plans, understanding of wilderness management techniques, use of the minimum requirements and MIST concepts to determine appropriate management response and actions, and minimizing the need for restoration of suppression impacts. **Cost, convenience, and efficiency are not the key determining factors for fire management actions in wilderness.** Firefighter and public safety and risk to adjacent lands are still key decision points for fire management in wilderness.

> **Goal** – Protect life, property, and resources from unwanted fire
> - Keep firefighter and public safety the highest priority in all fire management operations. LRMP GOAL 57 (pg 2-53)
>
> OBJECTIVE – reduce to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from the wilderness (FSM 2324.21)
>
> **Goal -**Allow fire to achieve its natural role

- Expand the role of fire to recover and sustain short interval fire-adapted Ecosystems through the use of both prescribed and managed ignition fires, including allowing lightning-caused fire to function, as much as possible, as a natural process; especially in Wilderness or other custodial management areas. LRMP GOAL 61 (pg 2-53)
- Manage fire in wilderness to benefit the wilderness resource and in accordance with the approved Wilderness Management Plans. LRMP GOAL 63 (pg 2-53)

OBJECTIVE – Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness (FSM 2324.21)
OBJECTIVE – Naturally ignited fires will be managed to achieve LRMP goals unless conditions determine wildfire will not achieve resource objectives.

Goal – Avoid unacceptable effect of fire and fire suppression
- Determine values at risk and conduct fire management operations to minimize damage to resources. LRMP Goal 60 (pg 2-53)

Standards –

General Forest
- Obtain approval from the Forest Supervisor for the limited use of mechanized equipment in management prescription areas where its use is normally prohibited. FW-187 (2-54)
- In all fire operations, emphasize the use of naturally occurring barriers to fire spread to the maximum extent compatible with other goals, objectives and standards; particularly riparian area standards. FW-194 (LRMP pg 2-54)
- Locate and construct firelines to minimize mineral soil exposure in both suppression and prescribed fire operations consistent with fire danger, values at risk, operational efficiency, and applicable objectives. Compliance may include adjustments to fireline location even when the readjustment may impose into an area prescribed for less fire use. FW-195 (LRMP pg 2-54)
- Firelines which expose mineral soil are not located in riparian corridors along lakes, perennial or intermittent springs and streams, wetlands, or water-source seeps, unless tying into them as natural barriers to fire spread at designated points with minimal soil disturbance. (see riparian standards for distances.) FW-196 (LRMP pg 2-54)
- Rehabilitation of wildfire control lines will be included as an objective of fire operations plans, will occur promptly after the burn, and will meet all other applicable standards of the Plan. FW-197 (LRMP pg 2-55)

Wilderness
- Use suppression methods with the least detriment to wilderness, unless the fire is threatening public safety within the wilderness or resources and property outside the wilderness. 1.A-012 (LRMP pg 3-11)
- Natural ignition fires may be managed in wilderness areas to allow fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role, as long as the applicable documentation has been prepared and approved. 1.A-014 (LRMP pg 3-11)

- Emphasize Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques (MIST) when suppressing wildfires in wilderness. 1.A-015 (LRMP pg 3-11)
- Use of motorized equipment in Wilderness will comply with FSM 2326. Regional Forester approval is required for the use of tractors in fire suppression. The Forest Supervisor may approve the use of limited mechanized equipment in Wilderness in instances of 'inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means.' 1.A-016 (LRMP pg 3-11)

Wilderness Study

- Use the minimum amount of ground, vegetation, or stream disturbance that is effective to achieve fire management objectives. 1.B-015 (LRMP pg 3-17)
- Use suppression methods with the least detriment to wilderness, unless the fire is threatening public safety within the wilderness or resources and property outside the wilderness. 1.B-016 (LRMP pg 3-17)
- Natural ignition fires may be managed in recommended wilderness areas to allow fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role, as long as the applicable documentation has been prepared and approved. 1.B-018 (LRMP pg 3-17)

GENERAL DESCRIPTION/CHARACTERISTICS

Safety

- Steep, rocky terrain
- Trails may become slippery with any amount of precipitation due to clay surfaces
- Complex terrain features and remoteness of the Wilderness can impact the effectiveness of radio and cell phone communications.
- Black Bears occur in most areas of the Wilderness. Also rattlesnakes, stinging insects, and poison ivy.
- Potential for high amount of visitor traffic due to high seasonal recreational usage.
- Numerous dispersed recreation sites
- Notify special use and permitted users of fire management activities
- Ensure public notification
- Fire management operations in the Wilderness rely heavily on aviation resources.
- Aviation Hazards – power lines or communication sites (outside of Wilderness boundary)
- The remoteness of the Wilderness means longer response times during emergencies. Extraction of injured personnel will be complex and depend heavily on local Search and Rescue efforts. Packstock, ATVs or UTVs may be authorized.

Physical

- Most of the Cohutta Wilderness lies in Georgia (Fannin-majority, Gilmer and Murray Counties) and within the Cohutta Wildlife Management Area. The Wilderness is administered by the Conasauga Ranger District of the Chattahoochee National Forest. Access to the wilderness can be gained via

trailheads and existing trails (see *Identified Infrastructure, pg. 9 and Infrastrucure map*). Approximately 1/2 of the wilderness is bounded by roads (roughly 22 miles).

- Cohutta Wilderness shares a border with the Big Frog Wilderness, which is administered by the Cherokee National Forest in Tennessee. The Tennessee Valley Divide separates the watershed of the Cohutta Wilderness from the Big Frog.

- The Wilderness is located in the Cohutta Mountains, which are part of the Blue Ridge Mountain chain. The area is characterized by steep, rugged terrain. Elevations range from 950 feet to 4150 feet.

- The Cohutta Wilderness lies almost entirely within the Upper Conasauga River watershed, with only 55 acres in the Middle Conasauga River watershed.

- The Cohutta Wilderness area is currently the only area on the Chattahoochee-Oconee classified as a Class I Airshed.

- Extensive railroad systems were created during the logging era in the Jacks and Conasauga River drainages, which became the basis for many of the Wilderness hiking trails.

- The Cohutta became Georgia's first congressionally designated wilderness in 1975, with additional acres added in 1986.

Biological

Vegetation types found in the Wilderness:

Community Type	Acres (approx.)	% of Cohutta Wilderness Area
White Pine, Hemlock and Cove Hardwood	3,600	10%
Oak/Hickory	14,500	41%
Yellow Pine/Mixed Oak	7,000	20%
Southern Yellow Pine	4,900	14%
Upland Hardwoods/White Pine	5,600	15%

- Age class of vegetation: The majority of the stands in the Cohutta Wilderness are over 60 years old, with a year of origin prior to 1950. Approximately 1,010 acres are between 40 and 60 years. The remaining acreage (162 acres) is between 39 and 17 years of age.

- 75% of the Cohutta Wilderness could be considered a 'short-interval, fire adapted ecosystem', with a fire return interval of less than 35 years.

- Threatened and Endangered species known to occur throughout the Wilderness include: None at this time.

- Jacks River and Conasauga River (and major tributaries) are the headwaters for T&E habitat downstream as well as highly valued sport fishing waters. Erosion and sedimentation are concerns.

Resources/Values at Risk

Special designations:
- Wilderness and Wilderness Study (Management Prescription Areas 1.A and 1.B, respectively)

Cultural and historical:
- Isolated occurrences of cultural and historic resources occur although none require protection from fire. Hickory Flats Cemetery occurs within the boundary of the Cohutta Wilderness.   Consult Forest Archeologist prior to soil disturbing activities.

Recreation:
- Infrastructure present is primarily limited to trail improvements within the Wilderness. Improvements directly adjacent include trail signs, bulletin boards, and gates in trailhead parking lots.
- Currently, no permitted outfitters and guides operate within the Cohutta; however many groups utilize the wilderness.
- Estimated 35,000 visitors annually.
- Dispersed camping, equestrian/foot trails, sightseeing/wildlife viewing day use, and hunting and fishing use throughout the FMU.

Identified Infrastructure:

Trails:

Beech Bottom	Hickory Creek	Rice Camp
Chestnut Lead	Jacks River	Tear Britches
Conasauga River	Panther Creek	Rough Ridge
East Cowpen	Penitentiary Branch	Horseshoe Bend
Hemp Top	Hickory Ridge	Benton Mackaye

Trailheads:

Dally Gap	Conasauga River	Tear Britches
Three Forks Mountain	Rice Camp	Horseshoe Bend
Betty Gap	Jack's River at Alaculsy Valley	
Chestnut Lead		
Hickory Creek	Beech Bottom	

Adjacent Infrastructure

Jack's River Fields Campground	Pinhoti Trailhead	Mountaintown TH

Bear Creek TH	Grassy Mountain Fire Tower	Sumac Creek TH
Bear Creek CG	Songbird TH	Cottonwood Patch Campground
Lake Conasauga CG and overflow	Tibbs ORV TH	Grassy Mountain Radio Tower
	Hickey Gap CG	

Overlooks:

Mountaintown

Mill Creek

In holdings and Subdivisions:
Within:

None

Adjacent:

Some portions of the Wilderness border Wildland Urban Interface, specific areas of concern are the Jone's Settlement to the east, which is bordered by wilderness on 3 sides.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Agency Administrator or Designee

- Communicate the land management objectives of the fire area to the Incident Commander /Incident Management Team (IMT) and to define specific land and fire management protection objectives. Periodically review for compliance and to ensure resource objectives are met.
- Ensure agency personnel are provided with appropriate MIST/ Leave No Trace (LNT) training and informational/educational materials at all levels.
- Participate in incident debriefing and assist in evaluation of performance related to MIST/LNT.
- Evaluate need for area closure order and initiate process.
- Request authorization for motorized/mechanical equipment use through Forest Supervisor (or Regional Forester for Tractor/Dozer use), if appropriate.

FMO/Duty Officer

- Carry out instructions given by the responsible line officer both verbally and through the WFDSS. Establish and nurture a close dialogue with the resource advisor assigned to the fire team.
- Review actions on site and evaluate for compliance with land line officer direction and effectiveness at meeting fire management protection objectives.
- Initiate WFDSS process.

Resource Advisor

- Ensure the interpretation and implementation of WFDSS and other oral or written line officer direction is adequately carried out. Provide specific direction and guidelines as needed.
- Participate at fire team planning sessions, review incident action plans and attend daily briefings to emphasize resource concerns and management's expectations.
- Monitor on the ground applications of MIST/LNT.
- Provide assistance in updating WFDSS when necessary.
- Participate in debriefing and assist in evaluation of performance related to MIST/LNT.
- Review Incident Action Plans (IAP) and provide specific direction and guidelines as needed.
- Lead MRDG process. Consult with IC and Line officer regarding need for mechanized/motorized equipment.

Incident Commander/Incident Command Team

- Communicate land and fire management objectives to assigned resources/general staff.
- Understand and carry out an appropriate suppression response, which will best meet the land management objectives of the area.
- Evaluate suppression tactics during planning and strategy sessions to see that they meet the Agency Administrator's objectives and MIST guidelines.
- If fire is likely to impact multiple jurisdictions, ensure that unified command is agreed upon and that all non-agency resources understand the management objectives and MIST/LNT guidelines.
- Insure all forces used on the fire understand the plan for suppressing the fire in conjunction with MIST. Monitor operations to ensure MIST is implemented during line construction as well as other resource disturbing activities.
- Ensure LNT practices are being adhered to in camp and during daily operations.
- Include agency Resource Advisor and/or local representative during planning, strategy, and debriefing sessions.
- Keep in communication with responsible fire management or line officer to insure understanding and support of tactics being used on the fire. Evaluate and provide feedback as to the tactical effectiveness during and after fire incident.

  Planning Section

    - Anticipate fire behavior and ensure all instructions can be implemented safely.
    - Use Resource Advisor to help assess that management tactics are commensurate with land/resource and incident objectives.
    - Ensure that instructions and specifications for MIST/LNT are communicated clearly in the IAP.

  Logistics Section

    - Ensure actions performed around Incident Command Post (ICP), staging areas, camps, helibases, and helispots result in minimum impact on the environment. Logistical needs to conform to LNT outdoor ethic will be more particular than normal fire operations.
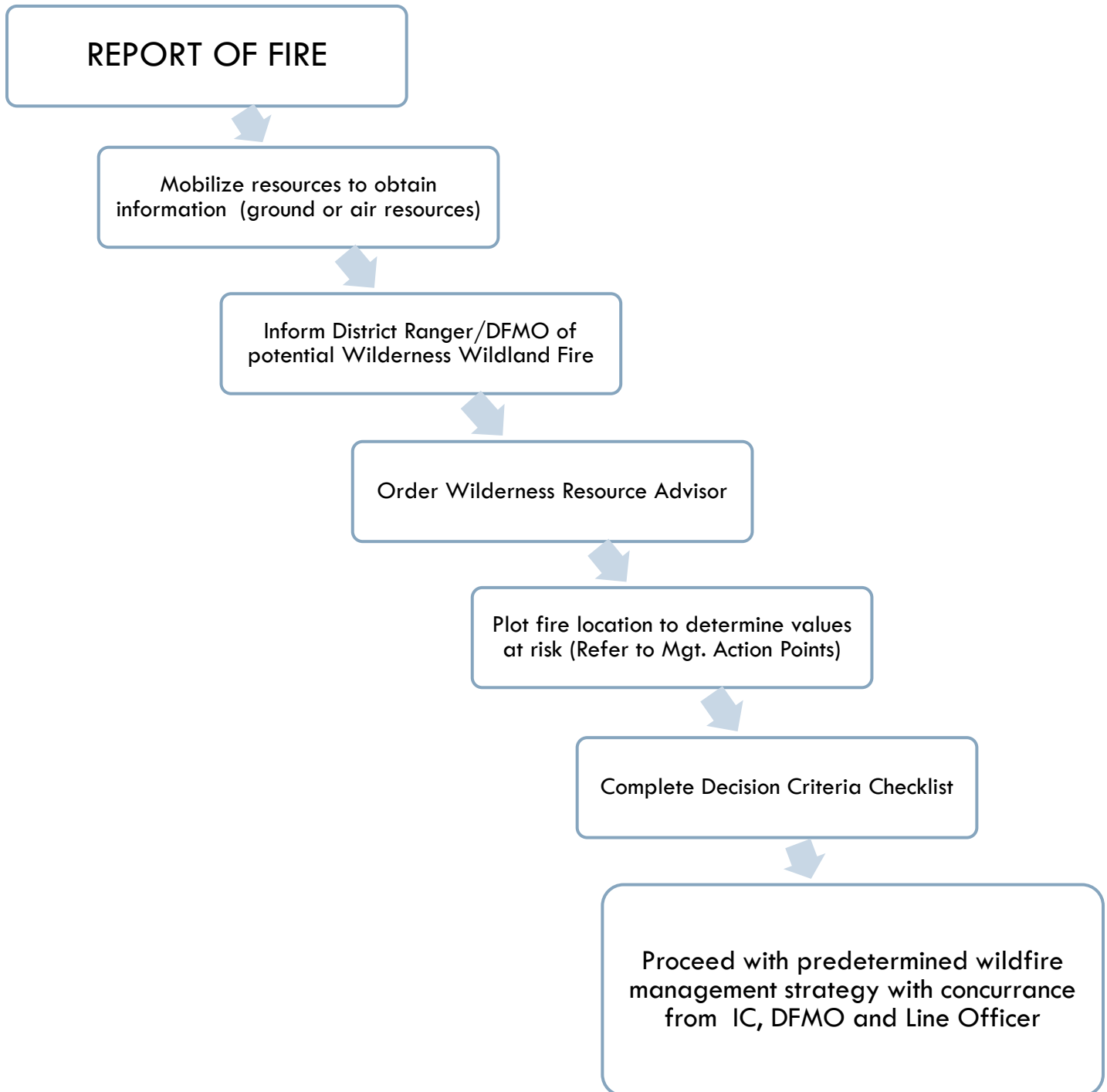
Operations Section

- Evaluate MIST objectives to incorporate into daily operations and IAP.
- Monitor effectiveness of suppression tactics in minimizing impacts to resources and recommend necessary changes during planning/strategy sessions.
- Communicate MIST to Division Supervisors and Air Ops/Support during each operational period briefing. Explain expectations for instructions listed in Incident Action Plan.
- Participate in incident debriefing and assist in evaluation of performance related to MIST.

Single Resource Bosses

- Monitor effectiveness of suppression tactics in minimizing impacts to resources and recommend necessary changes to supervisor.
- Communicate MIST objectives to crew members and monitor work to ensure that crews are adhering to MIST guidelines and specific incident objectives.
- Provide feedback to supervisor on implementation of MIST/LNT.

Wildland Fire Operational Guidance – Cohutta Wilderness

Management of Unplanned Ignitions

REPORT OF FIRE

Mobilize resources to obtain information (ground or air resources)

Inform District Ranger/DFMO of potential Wilderness Wildland Fire

Order Wilderness Resource Advisor

Plot fire location to determine values at risk (Refer to Mgt. Action Points)

Complete Decision Criteria Checklist

Proceed with predetermined wildfire management strategy with concurrance from IC, DFMO and Line Officer

PREDETERMINED WILDFIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

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:

- Alteration to the wilderness landscape
- Disturbance of the land surface or degradation of habitat or water quality
- Disturbance to visitor solitude
- Need for subsequent restoration or mitigation

The District Ranger will be notified of all wildland fires occurring within the District. District Ranger and District Fire Management Officer or Acting will meet within 6 hours of the reported ignition (or as soon as logistically possible) within the wilderness to participate in the WFDSS. The Forest Supervisor and Forest Fire Management Officer will be notified upon verification of wilderness fire.

Detection of fire using aerial patrol may occur. All flights for reconnaissance, monitoring, etc. will be kept to the minimum number possible, at the highest level possible, with minimal disturbance to visitor wilderness experience. Aircraft may also be utilized to locate visitors in the event of necessary closure to the area for public safety.

Wilderness Resource Advisors (WRA) will be assigned as soon as possible after detection of every wildland fire in wilderness on the Chattahoochee-Oconee NFs to monitor and work with fire management personnel. Current qualified WRAs can be found in the Appendix.

Wildfires caused by **natural starts** outside of the wilderness may be allowed to enter into the wilderness.

Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques (MIST) will be used on all wilderness fires. Leave No Trace outdoor ethic guidelines will be followed by all personnel while in the wilderness.

Use suppression methods with the least detriment to wilderness, unless the fire is threatening public safety within the Wilderness or resources and property outside the wilderness. Select management tactics commensurate with the fire's potential or existing behavior while producing the least possible impact on the resource being protected. Evaluate the appropriateness of water use and burnout operations to 'guide' fire, rather than ground disturbing equipment or line construction.

Consider the use of leafblowers, pumps, and water use (sprinklers, bucket drops) over use of ground disturbing handtools or mechanized equipment such as chainsaws and dozers.

Confine or contain wildfire spread within natural barriers unless additional measures are necessary to protect life and or property values. Consider more aggressive suppression efforts on fires that are likely to negatively impact private ownership.

Travel to and from fires should be planned considering impacts on wilderness values (response to National or Regional direction may dictate alternate travel methods in cases of extreme emergency). Utilize trailheads and existing trails for entry and travel routes, whenever possible.

District will make provisions for fighting fires in wilderness when motorized or mechanical equipment cannot be used. This will include having alternate suppression equipment available, special training for fire suppression crews, and use of confine or contain tactics.

All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs) are not permitted on wildland fires, including patrol. ATVs are banned from travel on hand-constructed fire lines and hiking trails for hauling and towing cargo, for carrying passengers; and for travel on terrain over manufacturer's recommendation for slope. Utility Terrain Vehicles (UTVs) are permitted on prescribed and wildland fire and may be used for hauling cargo, passengers and other supplies, including fuel, drip torches, and for patrol. Prohibit travel on terrain over manufacturer's recommendation for slope. (Chattahoochee-Oconee SUPPLEMENT R8-5100-2009-1)

No helispots will be constructed in the Wilderness without proper authorities. No dip sites will be used within the Wilderness boundary without proper authorities. The closest helispot to the Cohutta Wilderness is located at the Dalton Airport (DNN).

Preference will be given to water drops over retardant. Avoid aerial application of retardant or foam within 300 feet of waterways. Exceptions may be made when life or property is threatened and the use of retardant or foam can be reasonably expected to alleviate the threat.   The unit administrator should approve this deviation. Once foam or retardant is applied, the District Biologist, Forest Botanist, Forest Fisheries Biologist and Fish and Wildlife Service will be contacted for mitigation.

Signing and contacts will be restricted to portals except where essential for wilderness preservation, visitor safety, and resource protection.

Existing area Closure Orders limiting group size and use of pack stock have exemptions for public health and safety that allow firefighters/law enforcement to exceed.

WILDLAND FIRE DECISION SUPPORT SYSTEM (WFDSS)

The direction for the USFS is to enter all fires into WFDSS as of September 2009. Information entry requirements will vary based on the complexity and duration of the fire. Temporary paper forms for entering a WFDSS incident are included in the Appendix, as well as FAQ sheet and simple 'thought-flow' outline. A Line Officer WFDSS presentation is provided in the Digital Appendix, as well as other useful WFDSS information. There is currently no manual for WFDSS; however, the on-line help guide is a good resource.

In the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS), objectives are broken down in the following format: Management Requirements, Strategic Objectives, Incident Requirements and Incident Objectives. Management requirements and Strategic Objectives are derived from land and resource management plan and fire management plan standards and guidelines information. Management requirements and Strategic objectives are designed to automatically 'fill-in' based on information provided through the LMRP and FMP. However, this may not happen. Incident requirements and Incident objectives will be specific to an incident and will need to be entered. Instructions are included in the digital Appendix regarding how to add objectives as well as sample objectives.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT DECISION GUIDE

Managing fire in wilderness is guided by the minimum tool principle. Any time a mechanized advantage is being considered, the MRDG process should be initiated. A template is included in the Appendix. This effort should be led by a Wilderness Resource Advisor. This document should be included when requesting emergency authorization for motorized/mechanical equipment.

MOTORIZED/MECHANICAL DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY
See the Appendix for guidelines related to each category of motorized/mechanized use.

Allow the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport only for: Emergencies where the situation involves an inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means. Categories include fire suppression, health and safety, law enforcement involving serious crime or fugitive pursuit, removal of deceased persons, and aircraft accident investigations. (FSM 2320, 2326.1)

A sample letter requesting motorized/mechanical authorization is included in the Appendix.

Motorized/Mechanical Request	Authorization for Non-Emergency	Authorization for Emergency
Chainsaws, Pumps	Regional Forester	Forest Supervisor
Helicopters-Fixed Wing • Retardant Delivery • Bucket Work • Personnel Shuttle	Regional Forester	Forest Supervisor
Transport & supply by aircraft, air drop & mechanical transport	Regional Forester (2326.1)	Forest Supervisor
Helispot Construction	Regional Forester	Forest Supervisor
Motor Vehicle	Regional Forester	Forest Supervisor
Tractors (Heavy Equipment)	Regional Forester	Regional Forester
Prescribed Fire in Wilderness	Regional Forester	Forest Supervisor
BAER projects in Wilderness	Regional Forester (2323.04c.11)	Forest Supervisor

AREA CLOSURE ORDER
In the event that an area is deemed unsafe, or has the potential to become so, the District may choose to close the impacted portion of National Forest System lands to the public. The District Ranger will prepare a justification and map of proposed closure area and submit to Stewart Delugach (Patrol Captain) or designee. The justification letter should describe the issue (uncontrolled fire), define the area, and cite the applicable regulations. A sample justification letter and area closure sign are included in the Appendix. Once the closure order is approved, post closure order at District office and areas of public access (trailheads). **Do not** post until closure order has been signed. Public Information officers will distribute information of closure to the media in a timely manner.

Personnel involved in fire management efforts are exempted from existing closure orders limiting group size, packstock, and campsite use during an emergency. All efforts will be made to comply with orders when possible.

REHABILITATION OF BURNED AREA

Fire in wilderness is considered to be a part of the ecological processes that create the natural conditions that have statutory protection in wilderness. BAER stabilization treatments in wilderness are limited to those consistent with law and agency policy. Utilization of MIST throughout operations should reduce the need to rehabilitate any suppression-action caused damages.

Specific Forest Service Policy regarding BAER activities in wilderness is contained in FSM 2323.43b:

> "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"

and in 2323.43a:

> "Use indigenous or appropriate naturalized species to reestablish vegetation where there is no reasonable expectation of natural healing."

Additional direction regarding use of non-motorized equipment applicable to emergency stabilization is contained in FSM 2323.43a:

> "Use non-motorized equipment to accomplish improvement objectives. Only imminent threat to important values downstream justifies the use of motorized equipment."