

ALASKA INTERAGENCY FIRE PLANNING GUIDELINES  
BY  
The Alaska Interagency Fire Management Council

The Alaska Interagency Fire Planning Guidelines have been developed to expedite the completion of fire management plans in Alaska. The guidelines are the result of an evolutionary development that began in 1971 and culminated in the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan which was implemented in 1982 in the Tanana-Minchumina Planning Area. The Alaska Land Use Council has accepted the fire suppression criteria and the process outlined in this document as standards for Alaska.

Fire planning is an interagency effort that has had many people involved in the decisions made to date. To assist the new planner in understanding the background of these decisions, a brief history of the development of fire planning in Alaska follows.

The concept of a joint Federal-State planning body, designated to study land and resource issues which cut across boundaries of ownership began in Alaska in 1971 under the Federal-State Land Use Planning Commission. This Commission was succeeded by the Alaska Land Managers' Cooperative Task Force which identified fire as a problem of mutual concern to all agencies and organizations. On October 26, 1978, the Task Force chartered the fire subcommittee and issued the following charge:

Identify and seek solutions to specific and common fire management problems on an interagency basis, and to develop and initiate an interagency approach to the total fire management program and organization in Alaska. The primary objective is to provide guidance in revising fire protection standards to effect cost savings by developing a long-range fire management program.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of December 2, 1980, (P.L. 96-487) created the Alaska Land Use Council (ALUC) which replaced the Alaska Land Managers' Cooperative Task Force. The ALUC recognized the need for continuing wildland fire control coordination and created a Fire Control Project Group under the joint leadership of the Bureau of Land Management and Alaska Department of Natural Resources. The Group's assignments were to establish definitions and criteria for categories of fire protection and response and to establish a schedule, organization, and process for completing area fire plans. Upon completion of assigned tasks, and adoption by the ALUC, the ALUC recommended that the Fire Control Project Group reorganize under an interagency agreement in order to complete the prioritized schedules of area fire plans, smoke management plans, and other fire related programs.

Reorganization under a memorandum of understanding followed, assuring a continuing posture of fire management coordination in Alaska. The memorandum created the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Council (AIFMC) and provided for the original charter to remain in effect.

To more effectively carry-out its' function, reduce travel costs and member's time, the AIFMC has designated a Fire Planning Working Group (FPWG). The FPWG functions to call agency appointed planning team representatives together for organization, establishes a completion date for each plan, and to provide assistance as needed. Problems not resolvable by the team are elevated to the affected line officer or agency/organization head for resolution.

Generalized steps required to complete a fire plan are as follows:

1. The AIFMC recommends planning area(s).
2. Agencies/organizations appoint team representative(s). It is important to organize with a core team approach that represents the major landowners/mangers and suppression organizations within the planning unit. This approach maintains a reasonably sized planning team. Representatives should be selected who can provide interface with the internal organizational structures within their agencies. Other affected land managers input can be obtained as needed by the team.
3. The FPWG calls representatives together for team organization, presents the task, and recommends a completion date.
4. The team elects leaders, analyzes the need for additional representation from other land managers/owners, and organizes a mailing list for information flow. Concurrence of team leader selection is obtained from regional level/commissioner authority by the AIFMC.
5. After the recommended process is completed, and the plan is developed, it is returned to the AIFMC for review and distribution.
6. The AIFMC will coordinate signatures required for plan implementation. Private land owners requesting a change in existing BLM attack policy on their lands must so indicate in writing. Planning teams will provide these signatures.
7. The plan is implemented for an agency/organization upon signature by the responsible individual and notification of the fire suppression organization responsible for the area.

The Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan uses the Tanana- Minchumina Planning Unit (AIFMP: TM) as a model and reference document. To prevent unnecessary duplication and reproduction costs, the format from that unit is to be used as

described under Plan Format and Table of Contents (p. 8 ). Definitions and criteria for fire management, which were adopted by the ALUC, are included. Goals and objectives and general guidelines for all planning units were adopted by agency heads on April 19, 1983 (Appendix I).

#### PLAN GUIDELINES

- It is the adjoining land owners responsibility to come to agreement on protection boundaries.
- Planning teams must schedule and conduct planning sessions with village corporations. This will normally involve travel.
- Lines between protection levels utilize definable and recognizable natural boundaries. These boundaries should have suppression integrity.
- Planning area and protection level boundaries must be coordinated and compatible.
- These plans are wildfire management plans. Comprehensive fire plans, including prescribed fire, will be an agency specific supplement.
- Team members are encouraged to recommend ideas to the FPWG, which is responsible for evaluation and recommendation for incorporation into the Fire Planning Guidelines.

## RECOMMENDED FIRE PLANNING PROCESS

### Step No. 1 - Team organization

- A planning area team is called together and briefed by FPWG.
- A team leader is nominated.
- Considerations are given to additional representation.
- A mailing list is developed.
- A meeting schedule is established.

### Step No. 2 - Refine the planning area boundaries

- Considerations include:
  1. Use major geographic features.
  2. Minimize splitting administrative land units.
  3. Coordinate and match the boundary with neighboring fire planning areas.
  4. Planning areas adjacent to Canada will include the Canadian International Agreement (Appendix II).

### Step No. 3 - Delineate management units within the planning area to determine level of risk for selection of management options.

- Considerations include:
  1. Create or obtain a display of fire occurrence within the planning area to determine similarity of fire activity. Options include:
    - a. A BLM computer display at the 1:250,000 scale.
    - b. Reference to the paper "A Regional Approach to Fire History in Alaska," by Gabriel and Tande (1983).
    - c. Displays already completed by the suppression organization.
  2. Balance unit size against land ownership/management theme and projected fire regime obtained in 1 above.
  3. Isolate major urban areas into management units.

Step No. 4 - Determine general land ownership within the planning area.

-- Final land ownership is more properly a function of the operational atlas which will be addressed later in the process. Here it is only necessary to identify major holdings to allow a preliminary selection of the management options.

Step No. 5 - Fire History and Analysis

-- The following should be considered a minimum requirement:

1. A display of number of fires by cause, size, and year for the period of record available for the area.
2. A display of acres burned by year for the period of record available for the area.
3. A description of the typical fire behavior for each management unit within the area.
4. An analysis of the man-caused fires by management unit.
5. A display of mean number of fires by month for each management unit.
6. A display of mean acres burned by month for each management unit.
7. A discussion of large fires that have occurred within each planning unit.
8. A display of fire costs.

Step No. 6 - Identification of critical sites/areas as defined in AIFMP:TM p. 47.

-- Critical sites refer to potential loss of life and/or property from wildfire.

Step No. 7 - Identification of natural and cultural resource values. Identify only those warranting special suppression consideration. No specific effort need be made to acquire new data.

-- Natural resource values should be displayed on 1:63,360 USGS quad maps.

-- The glossary and map key displayed in Appendix III is provided as the standard. Symbols are available from the FPWG.

- Resource information includes, but is not limited to:
  1. Threatened, endangered and other rare species.
  2. Cultural sites. The errata statement AIFNP:TM meets State Historic Preservation Officer evaluation requirements.
  3. Commercial quality timber.
  4. Exposed coal deposits.
  5. Critical wildlife habitat.
  6. Scenic values.
  7. Soils.
  8. Critical fisheries habitat.
  9. Outstanding recreational values.
  10. Developed recreational facilities.

Step No. 8 - Preliminary management option selection and identification of conflicts.

- Option boundaries must be identifiable on-the-ground.
- Minimize the application of conflicting management options, i.e., limited against full.
- Maximize the use of natural fuel breaks.
- The evaluation dates transferring the modified option to a limited option status are June 10, 20, and the 1st, 10th, and 20th of July and August. Evaluation decisions will cover as wide an area as possible to reduce operational impact on suppression organizations.

Step No. 9 - Public participation.

- Public participation is required by various governmental organizations and is needed to:
  1. Inform the public.
  2. Obtain suggestions on management options.
  3. Review accuracy of resource data.

4. Identify public concerns and level of interest.

Step No. 10 - Provide a progress report to:

1. The Alaska Interagency Fire Management Council.

Review is to identify progress and assist in achieving compatibility with statewide terminology.

2. Responsible suppression organization.

Review is to obtain an expression of the operational feasibility of the planning decisions.

3. Signatory level of involved land manager/owner(s).

Review is to inform upper management levels of preliminary decisions to facilitate the approval of the final document.

Step No. 11 - Conflict resolution and final management option selection.

- Planning team leaders facilitate conflict resolution between individual land manager/owner(s). This is primarily in the area where compromise is required. Difficult problems are referred to affected line officers or agency heads for resolution.

Step No. 12 - Environmental Assessment.

- The environmental assessment contained in AIFMP:TM (p.71) has been approved as a regionalized programmatic statement for Alaska. For federal agencies, the finding of no significant impact, Appendix IV, is to be used. Amendments may be necessary in regions not typically considered as having a fire occurrence history.

Step No. 13 - Final printing and signing of the document.

- Land status and management option maps (1:1 million scale) are required for signatory review. The legend should follow AIFMP:DM Appendix "D" and "E."
- Team members have the obligation to obtain concurrence within their own agency or organization.
- The AIFMC will coordinate signatures required for plan implementation. Private land owners who request a change in existing BLM attack policy on their lands must so indicate in writing. Planning teams will provide these signatures.

Step No. 14 - Implementation requirements.

- Implementation will not occur until the map atlas is completed and the team has briefed the suppression organization(s) involved.
- The map atlas should include:
  1. 1:250,000 base map for the planning area and overlays that display the following:
    - a. management unit boundaries.
    - b. management options.
    - c. Generalized land status.
  2. A complete set of 1:63,360 scale quadrangle maps of the planning area that displays the following:
    - a. management options.
    - b. Native allotments.
    - c. significant resources as identified in Step No. 7.

#### PLAN FORMAT AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

Many sections of the AIFMP:TM plan contain interagency policy agreements or are supported by extensive fire ecology research. It is recommended that such sections be referenced in each fire plan. To maintain continuity and compatibility between plans, the following format will be used. Operational integrity will be maintained by using the glossary and map key prescribed.

Behind each topic in the Table of Contents there is a number which recommends how the planning teams are to address the various sections.

Number 1 identifies those sections which can be referenced as they appear. These sections are to be omitted from your plan text and referenced as:  
Refer to AIFMP:TM p \_ \_.

Number 2 denotes sections which can be used essentially "as is" in new plans. The original text should be referenced and new statements drafted only where needed.

Number 3 designates sections which must be rewritten entirely with text and data specific to individual plans.



ALASKA INTERAGENCY FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN  
PLANNING AREA  
AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS

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## APPENDIX I

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this plan is to provide an opportunity through cooperative planning for land managers/owners within the planning area to accomplish their fire-related land-use objectives in the most cost-effective manner. This will be accomplished by establishing broad fire management strategies for unplanned wildfires that will permit a reduction, compared to the past suppression only policy, in suppression costs commensurate with the value of resources warranting protection. Management options selected should be ecologically and fiscally sound, operationally feasible, and sufficiently flexible to be changed as new objectives, information and technologies become available.

The objectives of this plan are to ensure:

- Aggressive and continued suppression action will be taken on fires which threaten human life, private property, and man-made developments.
- Levels of fire suppression and dollars spent on fighting fires should be commensurate with the value of the resources warranting protection.
- Selection of fire management options will optimize the ability of the landowners/managers to achieve their individual management objectives for lands and resources they administer.

### GENERAL GUIDELINES

The plan is prepared within these general guidelines:

The boreal forest is a fire dependent ecosystem which evolved in association with fire and will lose its character, vigor and faunal and floral diversity if exclusion of fire is attempted.

This plan recognizes that land ownership will change for several years and that land use plans are in various stages of completion. Yearly reviews, modifications, and updates of the plan will be made accordingly.

This plan will be implemented during the coming fire season.

The current policy of total suppression will be replaced with a fire management program for the planning area.

The plan will establish fire management options which each land manager can apply according to his own land-use objectives and constraints. Each land manager/owner will notify the agency responsible for suppression of any desired changes in broad fire management strategies. Selection of fire management options does not preclude the development of prescribed burning programs by any land manager/owner.

The functions of allocating forces, detection and prevention will be considered and addressed as needed to accomplish objectives of the plan.

This plan will be developed under the Alaska Interagency Fire Planning Guidelines in order to be compatible with adjacent fire plans.

APPENDIX II

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT

- A. Synopsis. An agreement has been consummated by exchange of diplomatic notes between the US State Department and Canadian Government approving an agreement signed by Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development of Canada and the Secretary of the Interior. This agreement identifies the parties as follows: Canada - Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Canadian Forest Service) and United States - Department of the Interior (BLM).

The purpose of this agreement is for cooperation of both parties in the detection and suppression of fires in a buffer zone (an area 10 miles on either side of the boundary of Yukon Territory and Alaska). Upon detection of a fire anywhere in the buffer zone, either party may commence suppression action without prior notice to the other part. However, when the fire is on land of the other party, the party that initiated suppression action will notify the other party of its action. The party that initiated the action may continue or discontinue action on the fire by giving notice to the other party of its intentions. In the event one party commences suppression action in the buffer zone and notifies the other party, the other party may appoint a liaison officer charged to observe the progress and report on it or actively join the party which has commenced suppression action and participate in it. Unless otherwise agreed upon, a fire in the buffer zone that both parties take action on will be taken over by the party in whose territory the fire has occurred.

- B. Reimbursements. There are no reimbursements between either party, thus waiving all claims on liability against each other for any loss, damage, injury, or death resulting from failure of either party to begin suppression action or discontinue action. Each party will provide its own fire control resources in suppression action within the buffer zone, and assume its costs, expenses, and liabilities without any right of reimbursement from the other party.
- C. Fire Plan Operational Procedures. Where Alaska Fire plans have identified limited action areas (no initial attack) within the ten mile buffer zone, the following procedures will be adhered to:

Intent

It is our intent to prevent all fires originating within Alaska from crossing over into Canada, unless specific written agreements between adjacent land managers/owners permit exchange of wildfire across the border.

### Procedures

All fires detected within the ten-mile buffer zone will be immediately reported to the responsible protection agency. For follow-up communication with the involved land manager and responsible protection agencies, the following shall apply:

1. Fortymile Unit: AFS - FCC, follow-up by Circle Hot Springs FMO. This will change to: DOF, Tok Area Office after April 1984.
2. Copper Basin Unit: DOF, Copper River Area Office.
3. Upper Yukon - Tanana Unit: AFS - FCC, follow-up by Circle Hot Springs FMO.

If in the professional judgement of the evaluator, the fire possesses a clear and immediate threat to burn onto Canadian lands, immediate suppression action will be taken (unless modified by specific written agreement), commensurate with other suppression priorities.

In all cases, the involved land manager will be immediately notified of actions taken and or actions recommended.

APPENDIX III

MAP LEGEND

The map legend symbols are provided on "tack back" mylar to insure all teams use the same symbols for mapping. The symbols are used to identify five broad categories of information and specific suppression standards for sensitive features. The symbols were chosen to be compatible with the digitizing/computer graphics system used on the Fortymile Area Plan.

CATEGORY I: EXTERIOR PERIMETER OF THE PLANNING AREAS. A set of symbols is provided to distinguish which planning area, if any, is on either side of the outer boundary lines. The symbols provided refer to:

**UNPL** UNPLANNED AREA

**T/M** TANANA/MINCHUMINA PLANNING AREA

**FM** FORTY MILE PLANNING AREA

**CB** COPPER BASIN PLANNING AREA

**K-I** KUSKOKWIM-ILIAMNA PLANNING AREA

**U-T** UPPER YUKON-TANANA PLANNING AREA

**KK** KOBUK PLANNING AREA

**S-K** SEWARD-KOYUKUK PLANNING AREA

**K-A** KUSKOKWIM-ANVIK PLANNING AREA

**KN** KENAI PLANNING AREA



CATEGORY II: FIRE MANAGEMENT OPTION BOUNDARY LINES.

Large letter symbols are provided for each of the four management options: Critical (C), Full (F), Modified (M), and Limited (L). These, like Category I symbols, should be placed along the appropriate side of the lines frequently enough to insure that the dispatchers remain oriented correctly.

## C F M L

CATEGORY III: ALL STRUCTURES (including historically significant structures).

A small point designator symbol "S" is to be placed on the structure site. A small letter qualifier symbol is to be placed next to the point designator to specify what level of suppression the structure requires.

S C CRITICAL

S F FULL

S N NOT SENSITIVE

CATEGORY IV: KNOWN CULTURAL/HISTORIC RESOURCES (Not including structures). The symbol "Ä" is the point designator for these resources. Use the small letter qualifiers next to the point symbol to define activity level.

Ä F FULL

Ä A AVOID

CATEGORY V: T. & E SPECIES.

The symbol " " is the point designator for these resources.

F FULL

Ä<sup>\*</sup>  
A AVOID

Ä<sup>\*</sup>

NOTE: If the maps we prepare this year are to be used for digitizing, then the lines drawn must be thin!

Ä<sup>\*</sup>

APPENDIX IV  
FORMAT FOR SIGNATURE PAGE

I recommend the Bureau of Land Management and the State of Alaska fire suppression organizations implement the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan: (Insert Planning Area Name). I concur with the fire management option(s) to be applied on the lands administered by my organization. I have reviewed the plan and recognize the fire management options to be applied by the other cooperating organizations on lands adjacent to those administered by my organization.

(For Federal agencies only: I agree to adopt the environmental assessment of the Alaska Interagency Fire Management Plan: Tanana/Minchumina area. I agree environmental conditions are similar to this plan area and no additional environmental assessment is required. The findings show actions considered will not significantly affect the environment, therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required).

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Title)  
(Agency)

Date\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Title)  
(Agency)

Date\_\_\_\_\_

(Additional signature blocks as needed)

LITERATURE CITED

Gabriel, H.W. and Tande, J. 1983. A regional approach to fire history in Alaska. USDI Bureau of Land Management.

Alaska Fire Service  
Interagency Fire Suppression Plans

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES:

The purpose of these plans is to provide an interagency format for the expression and transmittal of the desired wildland fire protection levels of all land managing agencies and owners within the planning areas.

The objectives of these plans are as follows:

1. Establish and define fire protection levels for all lands within the planning area.
2. Establish and display protection levels that are operationally feasible, within existing policies, environmentally sound, and that fully consider off-site impacts and local social/economic considerations.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

--Assigned protection levels will establish the type and strength of fire suppression action initiated under normal conditions and provide for a priority setting procedure for occasions of high fire occurrence and/or extreme fire behavior that would require the adjudication of fire suppression resources.

--Plans and their defined protection levels will be consistent with DOI and State of Alaska policies concerning wildland fire suppression and will insure the integrity and appropriate expenditure of emergency fire fighting funds.

--Highest priority will be given to preventing the large disaster fire that would cause adverse damage to management objectives and/or socioeconomic conditions in the area or immediate vicinity.

--Plans may provide for a deviation from the policy of immediate and full suppression in areas where the value threatened does not warrant the expense associated with normal suppression procedures or where the land managers intent is to allow fire to pursue its natural course. These areas will be limited in their aggregated amount to a level that will ensure that protection levels off-site are not compromised. Such areas must have a historical record of low fire occurrence, absence of occurrence of conflagrations, or are self contained by effective natural barriers.

--The modified protection level appears to be an optimum level for a majority of Interior Alaska. This option allows the Suppression organization and Land Managers to evaluate escaped fires and then develop a strategy allowing cost-effective suppression actions commensurate with the values threatened and real-time statewide fire situation.

--The application of intentionally set prescribed fire for the purpose of achieving resource management objective, will be outside of the scope of these plans and will be fully funded by the benefiting resource and/or activity.