

## Wildland Fire Management Policy

The following section provides direction under **Alternative E-modified** that would subsequently be incorporated into more specific fire management plans. This direction is based on guidance and procedures for wildland fire, prescribed fire, mechanical and silvicultural treatments outlined in *Wildland and Prescribed Fire Management Policy - Implementation Procedures Reference Guide* (USDA 1998) and *Integration of Wildland Fire Management Into Land Management Planning - A Desk Guide* (USDA 1997). The direction also incorporates the 2001 program review of the *1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy* (USDA 2001). Refer to the **Chapter 1**, Other Related Planning Efforts and New information, for a description of this review.

### Wildland Fire

Nine elements from the *Integration of Wildland Fire Management Into Land Management Planning - A Desk Guide* (USDA 1997) were used to develop this strategy. Each element is outlined as it relates to all subsequent fire management planning efforts within the HCNRA.

#### Element 1: Range of Appropriate Management Responses

Fire suppression response refers to the appropriate management response to wildland fire that results in curtailment of fire spread beyond specified perimeter and eliminates all identified threats from the fire. All suppression activities provide for firefighter and public safety as the highest consideration, but minimize loss of resource values, economic expenditures, and the use of critical firefighter resources. The appropriate management response is defined as specific actions taken in response to a wildland fire to implement protection and/or fire use objectives. Management responses are programmed to accept resource management needs and constraints, reflect a commitment to safety, to be cost effective, and accomplish desired objectives while maintaining the versatility to vary in intensity as conditions change.

**Table C-21** provides the range of appropriate management responses by management area (MA) described in **Chapter 1** for the HCNRA. Whether fire suppression or Wildland Fire Use for Resource Benefits (WFU) would be appropriate in each management area is indicated in the two center columns.

**Table C-21: Range of Appropriate Management Responses**

| MA      | Fire Suppression | WFU | Remarks   |
|---------|------------------|-----|---|
| MA 4    | Yes              | Yes | Wilderness areas following the development of prescriptive criteria included in an approved FMP (fire management plan). Resource benefits accrue within this MA.  |
| MA 4-7  | Yes              | Yes | MA 4-7 is the section of the Wild and Scenic Imnaha River that occurs inside the Eagle Cap Wilderness.  |
| MA 4-12 | Yes              | Yes | Suppression only with Minimum Suppression Impact Techniques (MIST) and in support of larger suppression/contingency objectives or when outside criteria for area. Intent is for natural processes to occur.   |
| MA 7    | Yes              | No  | Primary considerations that preclude WFU in MA 7: Private land along Imnaha River from Pallette Ranch to Snake River, anadromous fish concerns in Upper Imnaha and water quality in Rapid River.  |
| MA 8    | Yes              | Yes | Contingency actions would be required to protect numerous administrative sites along with heritage sites identified for protection. Public safety would be a consideration within this corridor.  |
| MA 9    | Yes              | Yes | Requires coordination with permittees for active allotments. Idaho section requires coordination with Nez Perce National Forest. WFU potential is included to facilitate fire planning, identification of natural fuel breaks and geographic contingency areas, e.g. upper Horse Creek, north of Buckhorn Lookout, and Idaho side north of Wilderness boundary.   |
| MA 10   | Yes              | No  | Primary considerations that preclude WFU in MA 10: Active allotments and private land in Imnaha drainage; silvicultural concerns in North Fork Pine Creek drainage; and potential WFU size and resulting impacts to areas surrounding and adjacent to Basin, Bear, and Cottonwood Creek drainages at north end of HCNRA which are better candidates for prescribed fire. Suppression responses would be driven by risk and fire location. |
| MA 11   | Yes              | Yes | WFU north of Buckhorn Lookout, Upper Horse Creek, above Coverdale adjacent to the Wilderness, Idaho side adjacent to Wilderness boundary.   |
| MA 12   | Yes              | Yes | Intent is for natural processes to occur. Suppression would implement MIST and only as a part of larger suppression risk mitigation actions.  |
| MA 16   | Yes              | No  | Sites require protection - site plans should be developed to identify risk potential and reduction plans when appropriate.  |

**Element 2: Establish Range of Acceptable Tactics**

As directed in **Table C-1**, minimum impact suppression tactics (MIST) would be utilized for all areas within the HCNRA when a suppression response is required. Contingency actions would also utilize MIST when implemented within WFU areas. Fuel consumption with time, natural barriers, and weather would be considered in suppression tactics, but would be balanced against short-term and long-term costs and benefits. Wilderness suppression standards would be utilized; for example: consider the least tool concept and least obtrusive to the Wilderness setting. *Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Fire Management Plan* (USDA 2001) will establish aerial delivered firefighter protocol for Wilderness. In all situations firefighter and public safety will be the overarching consideration (see Element 7 below).

**Element 3: Establish Strategic Priorities**

Within the context of the larger landscape of the Blue Mountains region, the HCNRA ranks below many other areas of higher values at risk. Within the context of the HCNRA, two key areas stand out from a biologic and scenic consideration: along the Imnaha River, the area from Imnaha River Woods upstream to the Wilderness boundary and the headwaters of Big Sheep Creek, including Mud Creek and Lick Creek. These areas have private inholdings, scenic forest conditions, and numerous campgrounds and other recreational facilities. Areas immediately adjacent to all private land have a high priority. All other areas are low to moderate for strategic priority based on status of allotment, fire episodes of the future (loss of remaining forested habitat beyond historic range of variability (HRV), and potential final fire suppression costs.

Priorities for suppression responses due to limited resources and multiple ignitions are identified in **Table C-22**. Refer to **Table C-6** for the specific fire suppression priorities for individual recreation and administrative facilities. These priorities would be adjusted when conditions of fire behavior, safety, resource values, or other conditions indicate a different priority for an area.

**Table C-22: Fire Suppression Priority**

| General Area Description  | Specific Locations and Reasons   |
|---|--|
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 1</b>                                  |  |
| MA 7 (Wild and Scenic Imnaha and Rapid rivers)                      | All of MA 7 from Eagle Cap Wilderness boundary down stream to Forest Boundary near the Palette Ranch downstream to mouth of Imnaha River, and all of the Rapid River corridor. Numerous campgrounds, bridges, and other administrative structures are located in this area as well as private residences, farms, and ranches within the forest protective boundary.  |
| MA 10 (Dispersed Recreation/Forage)                                 | All of MA 10 on both sides of the Imnaha River from Palette Ranch north to Snake River. There is a high risk to private land and government facilities in this area.<br>All of MA 10 in McGraw, Upper Imnaha, and North Pine Creek areas due to large numbers of campgrounds, bridges, and other administrative structures.  |
| MA 11 (Dispersed Recreation/Timber)                                 | All MA 11 due to intermingled MA 16 (Administration/recreation sites) and forested vegetation values.  |
| MA 16 (Administrative and Recreation Sites)                         | Protect administrative and recreation sites located outside of the Wilderness areas, and surrounded by MA 7, 10, or 11 with a ¼ mile buffer.   |
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 2</b>                                  |  |
| MA 8 (Wild and Scenic Snake River areas with facilities)            | Protect administrative and recreation sites located outside of the Wilderness, and surrounded by MA 8 with a ¼ mile buffer.  |
| MA 9 (Dispersed Recreation/Native Vegetation areas with facilities) | Protect recreation and native vegetation sites located outside of the Wilderness, and surrounded by MA 9 with a ¼ mile buffer.   |
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 3</b>                                  |  |
| MA 12 (Research Natural Areas)                                      | Protect Duck Lake, Alum Bed, Lake Fork, and Basin Creek Research Natural Areas, located outside of the Wilderness, as a Priority 3.  |
| MA 8 (Wild and Scenic Snake River)                                  | All MA 8 areas within the Wild and Scenic Snake River corridor that are not in close proximity to any recreation and administrative sites, or historic structure complexes. Sites listed as Fire Suppression Priority 1 and 2 in <b>Table C-6</b> would be protected with a ¼ mile buffer around the site point or polygon.  |
| MA 9 (Dispersed Recreation/Native Vegetation)                       | All MA 9 - A large block of MA 9 stretches from Saddle Creek Overlook and Picnic Area north past Lord Flat (excluding areas with facilities) on Oregon side of the Snake River. This includes portions of the Horse, Lightning, and Cow Creek drainages. Recreation and administrative sites listed as Fire Suppression Priority 1 and 2 in <b>Table C-6</b> would be protected with a ¼ mile buffer around the site point or polygon. |

| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 4</b>             |  |
|--|--|
| MA 9 (Dispersed Recreation/ Native Vegetation) | Protect all MA 9 on Idaho side (north of the Wilderness) except those sites listed as Fire Suppression Priority 1 and 2 in <b>Table C-6</b> as a Priority 4.   |
| MA 9 (Dispersed Recreation/ Native Vegetation) | Protect all MA 9 (north of Buckhorn) except those sites listed as Fire Suppression Priority 1 and 2 in <b>Table C-6</b> as a Priority 4.   |
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 5</b>             |  |
| MA 4 (Wilderness)                              | Protect areas with facilities or historic structures within the Wilderness with a ¼ mile buffer as Priority 5.   |
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 6</b>             |  |
| MA 4-12 (Research Natural Areas in Wilderness) | Within the Wilderness, protect Lightning Creek, Bill's Creek, Little Granite, Pleasant Valley Research Natural Areas as a Priority 6.  |
| <b>Fire Suppression Priority 7</b>             |  |
| MA 4-7 (Wild and Scenic Rivers in Wilderness)  | Protect the Imnaha River inside the Eagle Cap Wilderness Area (above Indian Crossing Campground) as a Priority 7.  |
| MA 10 (Dispersed Recreation/Forage)            | Protect the area east of Cold Springs Ridge in the Basin, Bear, and Cottonwood drainages already burned by the Teepee Butte Fire (1988) as a Priority 7. The area should be conducive for wildland fire use for resource benefits (WFU).                                   |
| MA 4 (Wilderness areas)                        | Protect the Wilderness areas with no facilities and no Research Natural Areas within the following Recreation Analysis Areas (RAAs): Dry Diggins, Sheep Lake, Seven Devils, Baldy Lake, East Face, Lakes Basin, Saddle Creek, Lookout Mtn. and Buck Creek as a Priority 7. |

#### **Element 4: Establishes Economic Parameters**

Costs of fire management actions must consider values at risk, as well as the intrinsic values of preserving ecological aspects that led to the creation of the HCNRA. There are benefits as well as losses associated with wildland fire and prescribed fire. The opportunity to use different strategies on wildland fires will provide opportunities to reduce costs and improve utilization of scarce resources (fire fighters and equipment). Fire management actions will be conducted to provide the least cost-plus loss that will meet the intent of the *HCNRA Act*.

#### **Element 5: Establish Criteria for Protection of Critical Features**

Historical and administrative structures will be protected from destruction by fire. Refer to **Table C-6** for specific fire suppression priorities for individual recreation and administrative facilities. These priorities can be adjusted when conditions of fire behavior, safety, resource values, or other conditions indicate a different priority for an area. Resource advisors will be used on all extended and large fire suppression actions. Generally fire will be allowed to burn through most populations of threatened, endangered, and proposed or sensitive plants. Firelines will not be constructed through or will avoid any known threatened, endangered, or proposed plant species locations, unless coordinated with resource advisor and site determination can be made. Planning teams will consider protection and monitoring requirements in prescribed fire planning and during implementation of all fire-related projects.

#### **Element 6: Establish Constraints for Fire Intensity, Size and Duration, Seasonality**

Element 3 above outlines strategic priorities. The intent is not to exclude fire (except when private land or other values are at risk). The objective is to limit fire intensity within these areas. If intensity cannot be controlled, exclusion would be the objective until conditions modify or intensity factors (fuel loads) can be rearranged.

Prescriptive criteria will be developed for Wildland Fire Use for Resource Benefits (WFU) that will consider time of year and fire intensity factors. Size of fires when considering the establishment of maximum management areas (MMAs) must consider historic patch size along with the protection of sensitive features and habitat. Prescribed fire projects will consider historic fire seasonality and plant phenology. To the greatest extent that safety, risk potential, and social factors will permit, fire use will mimic HRV fire size, intensity, and seasonality. Human-caused fires under any season will receive a suppression response. Those that occur during early season growth phases would be aggressively suppressed. Fire size within the various biophysical environments have been estimated to range between a small spot/single tree to well over 60,000 acres. **Table C-23** shows fire regimes by biophysical environment.

**Table C-23: Fire Regimes by Biophysical Environment**

| Biophysical Environment                  | Fire Frequency                  | Fire Severity | Patch Size          |
|--|---------------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Grasslands                               | Very Frequent / 2-20 Years      | Nonlethal     | 0.1 - 50,000+ Acres |
| Ponderosa pine hot/moist                 | Very Frequent / 2-20 Years      | Nonlethal     | 0.1 - 20 Acres      |
| Ponderosa pine hot/dry                   | Very Frequent / 2-20 Years      | Nonlethal     | 0.1 - 20 Acres      |
| Douglas-fir warm/moist                   | Frequent / 20-50 Years          | Mixed         | 1 - 200 Acres       |
| Douglas-fir warm/dry                     | Frequent / 20-50 Years          | Nonlethal     | 1 - 200 Acres       |
| Subalpine fir (all)                      | Infrequent / 50-100 Years       | Mixed/Lethal  | 5 - 1,000 Acres     |
| Subalpine/Lodgepole pine cold/dry        | Infrequent / 50-100 Years       | Lethal/Mixed  | 5 - 1,000 Acres     |
| Subalpine/Lodgepole pine cool-cold/moist | Very Infrequent / 100-200 Years | Lethal        | 20 - 5,000 Acres    |
| Fire Refugia                             | 200+ Years                      |               |                     |

**Element 7: Establish Firefighter Safety Criteria**

Firefighter safety will not be compromised over resource concerns or objectives. Safety of firefighters is the highest priority given in all fire management activities. All activities and plans must reflect this commitment. Personnel assigned to a fire management action become the highest value resource for protection and receive the highest management considerations concerning strategy and tactics.

**Element 8: Establish Objectives/Desired Conditions/Standards and Guides Established for Each Management Area**

Refer to the Goals, Objectives, Standards and Guidelines for Fire in **Table C-1** of this appendix.

**Element 9: Establish Parameters for Risk**

Risk assessments will be completed and documented within the *Wallowa-Whitman National Forest Fire Management Plan* (USDA 2001) prior to the implementation of WFU. The basis of the risk assessment will follow the format found in the *Wildland and Prescribed Fire Management Policy-Implementation Procedures Reference Guide* (USDA/USDI 1998), manual direction, or through line officer direction. The elements to consider in the development of the risk assessment will be a combination of the following:

- Fire danger indicator(s) such as the energy release component (ERC), burning index (BI), normalized departure of vegetative index (NDVI), and fire potential index (FPI)
- Time of fire season: early, middle, late
- Long-term drought indicators such as: Palmer Drought, KBDI (Keetch Byram drought index), SPI (standardized precipitation index)
- Potential complexity

Appropriate management response for suppression actions will be guided by firefighter safety, values at risk, cost of tactical implementation, probability of success and failure - and the result of each outcome. Current and predicted weather along with time of year, natural features, and the impact to critical firefighting resources would also guide each suppression response. Under typical fire season conditions, when a suppression response is indicated, the response will be the most aggressive needed to safely mitigate the threat.

**Prescribed Fire, Mechanical, and Silvicultural Treatments**

Five elements from the *Integration of Wildland Fire Management Into Land Management Planning - A Desk Guide* (USDA 1997) were used to develop strategic direction identifies for prescribed fire, mechanical, and silvicultural treatments that relate to subsequent fire management planning efforts. Strategic direction for each element is as follows:

**Element 1: Establish the Desired Condition for Management Area**

Refer to **Table C-8** in this appendix for the historic range of variability for forested structural stages by biophysical environment. **Table C-1** describes the goals for forested vegetation.

**Element 2: Establish Air Quality Thresholds**

Refer to **Table C-1** in this appendix for the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines for air quality management.

**Element 3: Establish a Range of Acceptable Management Practices**

The acceptable fuel treatment management practices by management area are outlined in **Table C-24**.

**Table C-24: Acceptable Fuel Treatment Management Practices by Management Area**

| MA      | Management Area Description              | Prescribed Fire | Silvicultural Treatments | Mechanical Treatments |
|---------|--|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| MA 4    | Wilderness                               | Restricted*     | No                       | No                    |
| MA 4-7  | Wild and Scenic Rivers inside Wilderness | Restricted*     | No                       | No                    |
| MA 4-12 | Research Natural Areas inside Wilderness | Restricted*     | No                       | No                    |
| MA 7    | Wild and Scenic River outside Wilderness | Yes             | Yes                      | Yes                   |
| MA 8    | Wild and Scenic Snake River              | Yes             | No                       | Yes                   |
| MA 9    | Dispersed Recreation/Native Vegetation   | Yes             | No                       | Yes                   |
| MA 10   | Dispersed Recreation/Forage              | Yes             | Yes                      | Yes                   |
| MA 11   | Dispersed Recreation/Timber              | Yes             | Yes                      | Yes                   |
| MA 12   | Research Natural Areas                   | Yes             | No                       | Yes                   |
| MA 16   | Administrative and Recreation Sites      | Yes             | Yes                      | Yes                   |

\* Within MA 4, prescribed fires would only be used in areas where WFU cannot be safely implemented or is determined to not be compatible with Section 7 of the Act or other applicable laws.

**Element 4: Establish Fuel Treatment Priorities**

The fuel treatment priorities by management area are outlined in **Table C-25**.

**Table C-25: Fuel Treatment Priorities by Management Area**

| MA      | Management Area Description              | Prescribed Fire | Silvicultural Treatments | Mechanical Treatments |
|---------|--|-----------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| MA 4    | Wilderness                               | 4               | No                       | No                    |
| MA 4-7  | Wild and Scenic Rivers inside Wilderness | 4               | No                       | No                    |
| MA 4-12 | Research Natural Areas inside Wilderness | 4               | No                       | No                    |
| MA 7    | Wild and Scenic River outside Wilderness | 2               | 3                        | 3                     |
| MA 8    | Wild and Scenic Snake River              | 4               | No                       | 4                     |
| MA 9    | Dispersed Recreation/Native Vegetation   | 1               | No                       | 4                     |
| MA 10   | Dispersed Recreation/Forage              | 1               | 2                        | 3                     |
| MA 11   | Dispersed Recreation/Timber              | 3               | 1                        | 2                     |
| MA 12   | Research Natural Areas                   | 2               | No                       | 4                     |
| MA 16   | Administrative and Recreation Sites      | 4               | 2                        | 1                     |

1 = High Priority, 2 = Medium Priority, 3 = Low Priority, 4 = Very Low Priority, No = Treatment not allowed in MA

**Element 5: Establish Parameters for Risk**

Risk parameters will be developed in each burn plan or other treatment implementation document (mechanical or silvicultural treatment). The risk parameters are linked to the level of complexity of the project. Risk assessments for burning will consider fuels to be treated as well as adjacent fuels, weather factors, fuel moistures, proximity to private land or other significant features.

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