

INTRODUCTION

Reference Manual 18: Wildland Fire Management, Chapters 1 through 20 represents the most detailed and comprehensive guidance on implementing Servicewide wildland fire management policy for the National Park Service.

Reference Manual 18 (RM 18) provides NPS field employees legal references, operating policies, standards, procedures, general information, recommendations, and examples to assist them in carrying out Management Policies and Director's Orders.

The National Park Service's policy on wildland fire is expressed in this Reference Manual and the [NPS Management Policies](#), and [Director's Order 18: Wildland Fire Management](#). Supplemental policy regarding coordination and responsibilities for wildland fire operations is found in the [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#).

Reference Manual 18 provides the authority for a framework for the [NPS Wildland Fire Management Compendium](#) that is maintained to provide a ready reference of wildland fire management related directives, memoranda, and interim guidelines on issues that may or may not be discussed in *RM 18*. In some cases these documents are generated to further clarify issues that arise during the course of events that were not already clearly stated in other documents.

This is a revision of the previously issued *RM 18*. It has been updated to implement the [Guidance for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy \(2009\)](#) and is in compliance with [Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy](#) and [Departmental Manual Part 620](#). The provisions of this reference manual supersede all previous NPS instructions, requirements, and statements of policy relating to wildland fire management that may be in conflict.

Reference Manual 18 is intended to be read in its entirety. While certain chapters or sections provide important guidance by themselves, there is an interrelationship among the chapters that provides clarity and continuity for the management of wildland fire on lands administered by the National Park Service.

Reference Manual 18 will not be published and distributed in the traditional way. It will be available electronically and posted on the Internet. It contains web links to other information sources valuable to wildland fire and resource managers. To maintain this manual as a living document, revisions and updates will be made as necessary. As revisions are made they will be noted in the news section of [InsideNPS](#), if necessary the [NPS News Releases Website](#), and via electronic mail to all fire management officers and all fire program management assistants.

The format of the Internet presentation allows the user to print individual chapters and individual exhibits as needed. Notable features are as follows:

- Standards and guidance that exists in handbooks and guidebooks such as the [NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management](#) is cross referenced using web links, and redundant text is deleted from this manual. Interagency standards such as these are continually updated, so the need to also include them in *RM 18* is outmoded.
- Comprehensive lists of cited web links, definitions, and acronyms, appear in three separate appendices. Several chapters have their own exhibits, which are provided as clarifying documents.
- All links and their web addresses to outside documents and web pages are found in *RM 18*, Appendix 1, Websites. Compiling all of the links in one place will facilitate checking and updating them to ensure they are not broken. The links within the appendix will be updated as needed to keep them current.
- Formatting has been standardized for all chapters and there are now subheadings for chapter introductions and responsibilities for the national, regional, and park levels of the National Park Service.

The objectives of *Reference Manual 18* are as follows:

- Establish a framework through which the NPS institutionalizes and implements principles, policies, interagency organizational and operational relationships, and changes in law, policies, guidance, and reporting requirements.
- Provide a consistent approach for working effectively and efficiently with interagency partners and Servicewide programs such as natural, cultural, and wilderness resources.
- Develop clear guidelines for preparing, responding, and recovering from wildfire incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity.
- Include a core set of concepts, principles, terminology, and technologies covering the incident command system, interagency coordination systems, mobilization, training, identification, and management of resources.
- Adopt interagency standards established by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).
- Provide a framework for communicating the objectives and standards of the NPS wildland fire management program to internal and external audiences.
- Re-emphasize that firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.

The purpose of the Wildland Fire Management Compendium is as follows:

- Establish a framework through which interim wildland fire management related directives, memoranda, and guidelines are organized and made available to all levels of the organization for reference.
- Provide a common source of wildland fire management documents until they are incorporated into *RM 18* or [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#), become obsolete, or are superseded.

1 **Responsibilities**

National Level

The NPS Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation, is responsible for the NPS wildland fire program leadership, coordination and management at the national level. The NPS Branch of Wildland Fire, located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), Boise, Idaho, establishes and provides national coordination of wildland fire policy development and implementation. Specific wildland fire program responsibilities are found in each chapter of *RM 18*.

Regional Level

NPS regional fire management officers are responsible for NPS wildland fire program leadership, coordination and management within their regions. The regional fire management officers will provide training, oversight, and information to parks within their region and coordinate activities with other regions, agencies, and states as necessary and prudent for the program. They are also responsible for supporting, managing, and conducting overall performance reviews and evaluation of wildland fire activities. The regional fire management officers must involve other program areas such as law enforcement, budget, wilderness, cultural and natural resources, as necessary and appropriate, to ensure an integrated interagency program. Specific wildland fire program responsibilities are found in each chapter of *RM 18*.

Park Level

NPS park superintendents and, when delegated, fire management officers or collateral duty officers, are responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating wildland fire management activities within their parks. Park superintendents will ensure that their employees are trained and made available for participation in wildland fire management as the situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will support wildland

fire management efforts as necessary. Specific wildland fire program responsibilities are found in each chapter of *RM 18*.

2 Wildland Fire Management Program Objectives

Wildland fire management activities are essential to the accomplishment of the NPS mission. Parks must ensure that wildland fire management is fully integrated into land management planning. The management emphasis of *RM 18* is that the National Park Service will respond and manage wildland fire to protect the public, communities and infrastructure, conserve natural and cultural resources, and restore and maintain ecological integrity. This is based on federal fire cohesive strategic goals as follows:

1. **Restore and Maintain Landscapes:** Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.
2. **Create Fire-Adapted Communities:** Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.
3. **Respond to Wildfire:** All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.

The full range of strategic options is available to managers provided selected options comprehensively consider firefighter and public safety, cost-effectiveness, benefits, and values to be protected. Successful implementation depends upon actions and expectations both internal and external to federal agencies.

Wildland fire management policy and procedures reflect considerations, capabilities, and direction while being responsive to resource management objectives. Successful implementation of the policies depends upon actions and expectations both internal and external to federal agencies. Park superintendents must ensure that these policies are incorporated into all wildland fire management actions. Managers and other personnel must actively embrace and implement the recommendations, and every employee of every park must be committed to full implementation at the ground level.

3 Wildland Fire Management Program Requirements

The first guiding principle of [Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy \(January 2001\)](#) is that firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity. All fire management plans and activities must reflect this commitment.

Before implementing a comprehensive wildland fire management program, all NPS units must have an approved fire management plan with appropriate environmental compliance. Fire management plans are required for all parks with burnable vegetation. All parks with a fire management plan will have a fire management officer who meets established interagency and NPS competencies and concomitant qualifications. A fire management officer or collateral duty officer may be assigned to provide program management responsibilities to a park or group or network of parks when individually each park does not warrant a fulltime fire management officer.

Until a fire management plan is approved, park areas must take a management response that is suppression-oriented on all wildland fires and that is consistent with firefighter and public safety and resources to be protected. Public involvement is an integral part of the planning process and should be commensurate with the level of public concern.

Additional specific wildland fire program requirements are found in each chapter of *RM 18*.

4 Authorities

Authorities for the management of wildland fire on National Park Service lands:

1. [United States Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual](#)
2. [The National Park Service Management Policies, August 31, 2006](#)
3. [Director's Order 18](#)
4. [Reference Manual 18](#)
5. [National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Compendium](#)
6. [Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy, January 2001](#)
7. [Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy \(February, 2009\)](#)
8. [Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations](#)
9. [National Interagency Mobilization Guide](#)
10. [NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management](#)
11. [Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide](#)
12. [Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide](#)
13. [Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide](#)
14. [Incident Response Pocket Guide](#)

15. [Cultural Resources and Fire Module of RM #28A: Archeology \(the NPS Archeology Guide\)](#)
16. [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy](#)
17. [Department of the Interior Wildland Fire Handbooks and Policy Memoranda](#)

5 Structure of Reference Manual 18

There are 20 chapters in *Reference Manual 18*:

1. Introduction
2. Managing Wildland Fire
3. Standards for Operations and Safety
4. Fire Management Plans
5. Preparedness
6. Prevention and Mitigation
7. Fuels Management
8. Fire Ecology and Monitoring
9. Air Quality and Smoke Management
10. Training, Qualifications, and Certification
11. Wildland Fire Reporting
12. Fire Facilities
13. Fire Equipment
14. Wildland Fire Management Budget
15. Incident Business Management
16. Evaluations, Reviews, and Investigations
17. Fire Research
18. Post-Wildfire Programs
19. Information and Technology Management
20. Communication and Education

Three appendices supplement the information found in the *Reference Manual 18* chapters:

- Appendix 1: Websites
- Appendix 2: Definitions and Terms
- Appendix 3: Acronyms

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WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

Purpose

The purpose of this exhibit is to detail significant management controls for the National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Program.

Wildland fire management activities are essential to the accomplishment of the NPS mission. The management emphasis is that the National Park Service manages wildland fire to protect the public, communities and infrastructure, conserve natural and cultural resources, and restore and maintain ecological health. Federal and National Park Service management controls set the framework and provide direction for management decisions to achieve these objectives.

It must be stated that the first guiding principle of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001) is that firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.

Furthermore, Parks must ensure that wildland fire management is fully integrated into land management planning.

Process Activities and the NPS Directives System

The NPS Directives System consists of internal instructions and guidance documents to ensure that NPS managers and staff have clear information on NPS policy for recommended actions. It is intended to reflect the NPS organizational values. The Directives System is composed of three levels of documents:

- NPS Management Policies
- Director's Orders
- Reference Manuals, guides, and handbooks

The National Park Service's policy on wildland fire is expressed in the NPS Management Policies and Director's Order 18: Wildland Fire Management. Supplemental policy regarding coordination and responsibilities for wildland fire operations is found in the Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations.

Reference Manual 18: Wildland Fire Management, Chapters 1 through 20, represents the most detailed and comprehensive guidance on implementing Servicewide wildland fire management policy for the National Park Service. *Reference Manual 18* provides NPS field employees legal references, operating policies, standards, procedures, general information, recommendations, and examples to assist them in carrying out Management Policies and Director's Orders. Policy and guidance that exists in

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interagency handbooks and guidebooks such as the Interagency Incident Business Management Handbook is cross referenced in *RM 18* using web links, and redundant text is deleted from the manual. Interagency standards such as these are continually updated, so the need to also include them in *RM 18* is outmoded.

The objective of *Reference Manual 18* is as follows:

- Establish a framework through which the NPS institutionalizes and implements principles, policies, interagency organizational and operational relationships, and changes in law, policies, guidance, and reporting requirements.
- Provide a consistent approach for working effectively and efficiently with interagency partners and Servicewide programs such as natural, cultural, and wilderness.
- Develop clear guidelines for preparing, responding, and recovering from wildfire incidents, regardless of cause, size, or complexity.
- Include a core set of concepts, principles, terminology, and technologies covering the incident command system, interagency coordination systems, mobilization, training, identification, and management of resources.
- Adopt interagency standards established by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG).
- Provide a framework for communicating the objectives and standards of the NPS wildland fire management program to internal and external audiences.
- Re-emphasize that firefighter and public safety is the first priority in every fire management activity.

Wildland Fire Management Policy and Authorities

Policy and authorities for the management of wildland fire on National Park Service lands:

1. United States Department of the Interior, Departmental Manual

The Departmental Manual incorporates the permanent policy documents approved by the Secretary or the Assistant Secretary - Policy, Management and Budget. These include organization descriptions; delegations of authority; and policies, procedures, and standards for administrative, legal, legislative, informational and program activities of the Department.

Departmental Manual Part 620: Wildland Fire Management:
<https://www.doi.gov/elips/browse>

2. The National Park Service Management Policies, August 31, 2006

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The NPS Management Policies is the basic Servicewide policy document of the National Park Service. It is the highest of three levels of guidance documents in the NPS Directives System. Many of the public laws and other guidance affecting the various facets of NPS administration and management are cited for reference purposes throughout these Management Policies. Other laws, regulations, and policies related to the administration of federal programs, although not cited, may also apply.

https://www.nps.gov/policy/MP_2006.pdf

3. *Director's Order 18, Wildland Fire Management*

The Director's Order states the basic principles and strategic guidelines governing the management of wildland fire by the National Park Service. The companion document, *Reference Manual 18 (RM-18)*, is issued by the Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection, and is a technical expression of background information, standardized definitions, agency requirements, standards, and procedures for implementing *Director's Order #18*.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/fire/wildland-fire-plans-and-policy.htm>

4. *Reference Manual 18, Wildland Fire Management*

As mentioned above, Reference Manual 18 provides NPS field employees legal references, operating policies, standards, procedures, general information, recommendations, and examples to assist them in carrying out Management Policies and Director's Orders.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/fire/wildland-fire-plans-and-policy.htm>

5. National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Compendium

The National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Compendium is maintained to provide a ready reference and common source of wildland fire management related directives, memoranda, and guidelines on issues that may or may not be discussed in *RM 18* until they are incorporated into *RM 18* or Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations, become obsolete, or are superseded. In some cases these documents are generated to further clarify issues that arise during the course of events that were not already clearly stated in other documents.

<http://famshare.inside.nps.gov/wildlandfire/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fwildlandfire%2FShared%20Documents%2FWildland%2>

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[0Fire%20Management%20Compendium&FolderCTID=0x0120003EA0186A0B851F46A06E1F9F58F7F167&View={5E27FE9B-271F-4663-8F59-F209D6E972B7}](https://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/Policy/FederalWildlandFireManagementPolicy_2001F46A06E1F9F58F7F167&View={5E27FE9B-271F-4663-8F59-F209D6E972B7})

6. 2001 Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy

The Departments of the Interior and Agriculture, together with Tribal governments, States, and other jurisdictions, are responsible for the protection and management of natural resources on lands they administer. Because wildland fire respects no boundaries, uniform Federal policies and programs are essential. The 2001 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy is focused on internal federal agency strategic direction for a broad range of fire management related activities.

https://www.nifc.gov/PIO_bb/Policy/FederalWildlandFireManagementPolicy_2001.pdf

7. Guidance for Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy, 2009

This document replaces the Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (June 20, 2003). It consolidates and clarifies changes that have occurred since the 2003 strategy document was issued, and provides revised direction for consistent implementation of the Review and Update of the 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (January 2001). The intent of this framework is to solidify that the full range of strategic and tactical options are available and considered in the response to every wildland fire. These options are to be used to achieve objectives as described in Land and Resource Management Plans and Fire Management Plans. Mutually developed objectives with adjoining jurisdictions for managing fires that crosses jurisdictional boundaries will also be recognized. This guidance also calls for increased dialogue and collaboration between federal agencies and tribal, local, and state agencies as plans are updated and implemented to manage wildfires in order to accomplish resource and protection objectives.

https://www.nifc.gov/policies/policies_documents/GIFWFMP.pdf

8. Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations

The Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations, states, references, or supplements policy for Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service, and National Park Service fire and fire aviation program management. Original source policy is stated or referenced throughout this handbook.

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https://www.nifc.gov/policies/pol_ref_redbook.html

9. National Interagency Mobilization Guide

The National Interagency Mobilization Guide identifies standard procedures which guide the operations of multi-agency logistical support activity throughout the coordination emergency response for wildland fire. This Guide is intended to facilitate interagency dispatch coordination, ensuring the timeliest and cost effective incident support services available are provided.

<https://www.nifc.gov/nicc/mobguide/index.html>

10. NWCG Standards for Interagency Incident Business Management

This handbook was developed under the auspices of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG). The NWCG was formed March 18, 1976, by cooperative agreement between the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior. This handbook was developed to assist participating agencies of the NWCG to constructively work together to provide effective execution of each agency's incident management program by establishing procedures for:

- Uniform application of regulations on the use of human resources, including payroll, commissary, injury compensation, and travel.
- Acquisition of necessary equipment and supplies from appropriate sources in accordance with applicable procurement regulations.
- Managing and tracking government property.
- Financial coordination with the protection agency and maintenance of finance, property, procurement, and personnel records and forms.
- Use and coordination of incident business management functions as they relate to sharing of resources among federal, state, and local agencies, including the military.
- Investigation and reporting of accidents.
- Investigating, documenting, and reporting claims.
- Documenting costs and implementing cost-effective criteria for managing incident resources.
- Non-fire incidents administrative processes.

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms902.pdf>

11. Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Reference Guide

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The Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedures Guide provides standardized procedures, specifically associated with the planning and implementation of prescribed fire. These procedures meet all policy requirements described in the 2003 Interagency Strategy for the Implementation of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy.

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms484.pdf>

12. Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards and Guide

The Interagency Fire Program Management Qualifications Standards establishes minimum qualifications for fire managers and agency administrators who are required to make fire management decisions.

<https://www.ifpm.nifc.gov/standard/ifpmstandard.htm>

13. Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide

The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Wildland Fire Incident Management Field Guide states, references, or supplements wildland fire incident management and operational standards established by NWCG.

<https://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/publications/pms210.pdf>

14. Incident Response Pocket Guide

The Incident Response Pocket Guide is a wildland fire job aid and training reference for operational personnel. It also has a secondary application for all-hazard incident response. This guide provides a collection of best practices that have evolved over time within the wildland fire service. It does not provide absolute solutions to the unlimited number of situations that will occur.

<https://www.nwcg.gov/publications/461>

15. Cultural Resources and Fire Module of RM #28A: Archeology

The *Cultural Resources and Fire Module of RM #28A: Archeology* (the NPS Archeology Guide) provides guidance for managing and protecting cultural resources that may be affected by wildland and structural fires.

<https://www.nps.gov/archeology/npsGuide/fire/>