



Forest
Service

Payette
National
Forest

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Subject: Leaders Intent for Fire in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness

To: East Zone and Forest Duty Officers

Intent – The intent of this document is to compile direction in relation to fire management activities within the Frank Church – River of No Return Wilderness on the Payette National Forest. The intent is to provide an overview of operating parameters, provide a framework for fire engagement decisions and clear direction to firefighting resources.

Fire Fighter and public safety will be overriding factors for any decisions regarding fire management.

Protect and preserve wilderness character. Each decision will be made to minimize impact to the naturalness, solitude, undeveloped or untrammelled nature of the Wilderness, in an effort to keep Wilderness ecosystems unaffected by human influences. Where choices must be made between protecting Wilderness character and having short or long term effects to the Wilderness; providing for the safety of firefighters while preserving the Wilderness character will be the overriding value. Economy, convenience, commercial value and comfort are not standards of management or use of Wilderness.

All aspects of fire management must be given careful consideration before committing to engage with firefighters. Initial engagement decisions make future options to protect the Wilderness fewer in numbers, more difficult, costly, and greater exposure to implement. Long term effects of suppression, both in tactics and in long term exclusion of fire, must be given considerable attention when developing initial engagement options.

Reference Payette Forest Resource Guidelines and (MIST) for acceptable minimum impact management techniques. These guidelines will be followed as closely as possible during suppression, mop up, and restoration – rehabilitation phases of the fire management action.

All fire management activities will conform to “leave no trace” principles and minimum impact suppression tactics.

Wilderness –

The Forest Service has long recognized that Wilderness is a very special place, to be managed differently than other acres of National Forest System land. We have also known that Wilderness is not a place that is completely free of human manipulation and Agency management. The authors of the Act used careful terms which gave land managers some discretion in our management. The Act directs us to manage Wilderness so that *“the imprint of man is substantially unnoticeable”*.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 states that, “...such measures may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire, insects, and diseases, subject to such conditions as the Secretary deems desirable.”



This language in the law supports the Federal Fire Policy and use of the appropriate management response to wildfire in wilderness.

The Wilderness Act also provides that, "...except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area." This language indicates that use of motorized equipment, landing of aircraft, etc. may be authorized for fire management activities but only if it is the minimum necessary requirement.

And, the Wilderness Act mandates that, "... each agency administering any area designated as wilderness shall be responsible for preserving the wilderness character of the area and shall so administer such area for such other purposes for which it may have been established as also to preserve its wilderness character." This language requires that the natural and untrammelled qualities of wilderness character be preserved by recognizing the role of fire in wilderness and limiting human caused manipulations of that process through suppression or prescribed fire activities (ACNWTC Wilderness Desk Guide).

National Policy –

Manage the wilderness resource to ensure its character and values are dominant and enduring. Its management must be consistent over time and between areas to ensure its present and future availability and enjoyment as wilderness. Manage wilderness to ensure that human influences does not impede the free play of natural forces or interfere with natural successions in the ecosystem and to ensure that each wilderness offers outstanding opportunities for solitude and unconfined type of recreation (FSM 2320, 1/07).

2320.02

1. Maintain and perpetuate the enduring resource of wilderness as one of the multiple uses of National Forest System land.
2. Maintain wilderness in such a manner that ecosystems are unaffected by human manipulation and influences so that plants and animals develop and respond to natural forces.
3. Minimize the impact of those kinds of uses and activities generally prohibited by the Wilderness Act, but specifically excepted by the Act or subsequent legislation.
4. Protect and perpetuate wilderness character and public values including, but not limited to, opportunities for scientific study, education, solitude, physical and mental challenge and stimulation, inspiration, and primitive recreation experiences.
5. Gather information and carry out research in a manner compatible with preserving the wilderness environment to increase understanding of wilderness ecology, wilderness uses, management opportunities, and visitor behavior.

2323.52

1. Permit ecological processes to operate naturally.
2. Recognize both climax and successional biotic communities as natural and desirable.
3. Allow, wherever possible, the natural process of healing in handling disturbed communities. Consider structural or vegetative assistance only as a last resort.

Our Forest Service Manual 2324.21 describes objectives for fire in Wilderness simply and consistently with the Wilderness Act(s) by which Wilderness is managed. These two objectives are:

1. Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness.
2. Reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.

We are directed to use approved Forest Plans and Wilderness management plans as our guide and have a minimum impact on the Wilderness character.

In FSM 2324.23, we are directed to conduct all fire management activities within wilderness in a manner compatible with overall wilderness management objectives. Give preference to using methods and equipment that cause the least:

1. Alteration of the wilderness landscape.
2. Disturbance of the land surface.
3. Disturbance to visitor solitude.
4. Reduction of visibility during periods of visitor use.
5. Adverse effect on other air quality related values.
6. Locate fire camps, helispots, and other temporary facilities or improvements outside of the wilderness boundary whenever feasible. Rehabilitate disturbed areas within wilderness to as natural an appearance as possible.

The Forest Supervisor approves the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport under conditions described in section 2326.1, item 1 or 3. However, the Regional Forester shall approve the use of tractors for fire suppression.

2326.1 – Conditions Under Which Use May Be Approved

Allow the use of motorized equipment or mechanical transport only for:

1. 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.

Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness –

The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness (FCRONRW) is truly one of the gems of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The FCRONRW was designated by the 1980 Central

Idaho Wilderness Act. Although relatively young, this is not to say that these 2.4 million acres of central Idaho is anything but truly wild. The FCRONRW was created out of the Idaho and Salmon River Breaks Primitive Areas and surrounding roadless areas, and most places have been managed as de-facto wilderness since the Forest Reserves.

All aspects of management are directed by the Frank Church Plan and Forest Plan which directs that:

- *lightning caused fires in Wilderness will be permitted to play, as nearly as possible, their ecological role within the FCRONRW.*
- The Plan further provides a Standard of ***All lightning caused fires will be evaluated as potential Wildland Fire Use candidates and that,***
- *Suppression actions will be taken where lightning-caused fires pose serious threats to life and/or property within the wilderness or life, property or natural resources outside the wilderness.*

Managers of the FCRONRW have been instrumental in allowing lightning caused fire to play a natural role in the Wilderness. After almost two decades, the Wilderness has a mosaic of fire effects that pose both a challenge to managers as well as represent a maintaining or return to a naturally functioning ecosystem.

To meet the intent of the Plan and the Chiefs 2014 Intent, Agency Administrators must evaluate all lightning caused fires for their potential to play a natural role in Wilderness and apply 2014 Wildland Fire Risk Management Protocols. To assist in this evaluation below are some questions that should be discussed prior to committing to initial engagement. This is not an all-inclusive list, but an example of a thought process for evaluating fire in Wilderness.

- Are there Values at Risk?
 - How Far away are Values?
 - Are Values in the typical spread direction of fires in this area?
 - What is the probability of fire impacting Values?
 - Estimate (hours, days, months) when values would be impacted?
 - Is there old fire scars between fire and Values?
 - Can Values be point protected?
- What are the risks to firefighters?
 - Steep terrain
 - Aerial ingress/egress
 - Snags
 - Why would we put firefighters at risk?
- What are the benefits to fire suppression?
 - Are we protecting life?
 - Are we protecting property?
 - Are we protecting natural resources outside of Wilderness?
 - Are we protecting political values? – smoke, etc.

- Will there be impacts to Wilderness by suppression actions?
 - Physical impacts
 - Social impacts – motorized/mechanized intrusions
 - Political impacts
 - Closures?

- Are there other factors to consider?

My intent is that at each new natural ignition, a robust conversation takes place to determine why we would take initial action. I expect that your starting point for the discussion is that fire be allowed to play its natural role in the Wilderness unless there are highly probable, unacceptable consequences associated with that fire.

I expect that Wilderness managers and fire managers engage in this conversation with the District Ranger or acting Agency Administrator. I expect that the conversation is based on the probabilities of the fire negatively impacting known Values at Risk. I expect that the conversation utilize the Payette National Forest Wilderness Fire Engagement Guidelines (attached) to make an informed risk decision. I understand that this conversation may take time and require information, and I am comfortable taking that time to make the right initial decision to reduce the risk to firefighters, manage incidents costs and prevent unnecessary impacts to the Wilderness Character.

I expect that you be prepared to manage long duration fires. I expect that when natural fire occurs in the Wilderness that to reduce cost and exposure, we utilize lookouts and other management options to minimize overflights to monitor natural fire. During long duration fires, I expect that you prepare for the worst case scenario, but act upon probabilities of that fire impacting values and to reduce risk, exposure, cost and impacts to Wilderness.

I expect firefighters to know that motorized/mechanized travel will be an option, when there is an emergency of *inescapable urgency*, but not the preferred method. I will consider authorizing the use of motorized/mechanized at the District Ranger's recommendation. I will not further delegate this authorization. I expect that if the decision to engage is made, that all firefighters understand and accept that we have options for the appropriate management response. That firefighters understand and accept that while their safety is tantamount, they may be asked to engage that fire differently than they would in other places on the Forest. They need to be prepared to hike, pack gear, spike out for extended periods of time without fresh food resupply, minimize physical impacts, monitor instead of taking direct action, etc.

These are expectations I have for other employees working in Wilderness, that other employees are able to do safely for thousands of work days each summer and this is my intent for firefighters in Wilderness. If you feel they cannot manage fire safely in this type of setting, with these management options, then this needs to be discussed prior to deploying these firefighters and we will not engage firefighters not prepared or committed to work in Wilderness safely.

I expect that if there are no values imminently threatened, or values could be point protected, that we not put firefighters at risk, incur unneeded expense or trammel the Wilderness with our management. I expect that you understand a large part of your job on the East Zone is to manage natural fire for long durations.

KEITH B. LANNOM
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure