

NAFSR Talking Points on Wildland Fire Management Transfer

Talking Points for NAFSR Membership

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These talking points summarize NAFSR's position on the proposed transfer of Wildland Fire Management out of the Forest Service to the recently formed US Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) currently with the Department of Interior.

Members are encouraged to use these points when discussing this issue with colleagues, partners, and stakeholders.

Wildland Fire Management Cannot Be Separated from Land Management

- Wildland fire management is more than suppression—it is an integral component of land and resource stewardship.
- Wildland Fire and Aviation Management encompasses prescribed burning, fuels treatment, and coordination with timber management and planning.
- Separating fire from land management agencies risks loss of forest resilience and undermines active land management strategies.
- Full integration of wildland fire management with land management and research is critical to addressing the root causes of catastrophic wildfire.

The Interagency Coordination System Works—and Can Be Improved

• Clearly effective wildland fire management requires all partner's cooperation, federal, state, tribal, and private. The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (2009) is a strongly supported long-term interagency strategic plan for wildland fire management. It provides the framework to work collaboratively among all stakeholders and across all landscapes to make meaningful progress towards the three goals of:

1. Resilient Landscapes,
2. Fire Adapted Communities, and
3. Safe and Effective Wildfire Response.

Cross boundary and government-level coordination cannot be lost in efforts to improve the holistic wildland fire management system. The Cohesive Strategy and all revisions have been approved by the last three administrations.

- The current interagency coordination and response system has been in place since 1976, with ongoing improvements to meet changing conditions.
- National coordination through the National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC) in Boise, along with regional and state Interagency Geographic Coordination centers, provides a proven framework.

The Fire and Non-Fire Workforce Are Interdependent

- Of the ~19,360 fire-qualified (red-carded) Forest Service personnel, approximately half (9,597) are non-primary fire staff—serving as secondary firefighters, overhead, and support personnel.
- The non-fire workforce (“militia”) holds a significant share of the agency’s prescribed fire qualifications, particularly in the southern states.
- On complex incident management teams, a high percentage of qualified personnel are militia and Administratively Determined (emergency firefighter) employees—without them, we could not staff all needed teams during fire season.
- Primary fire personnel also perform critical non-fire duties during the off-season: road and trail clearing, recreation maintenance, range fence building, and fuels reduction. How this work would be accomplished under a transferred structure remains unanswered.

Budget Transfer Threatens the Broader Forest Service Mission

- A transfer of wildland fire management would likely carry with it significant funding that currently supports non-fire Forest Service functions and personnel.
- Non-fire personnel directly support the wildland fire mission—their loss would degrade both fire and land management capacity.
- Diverting Forest Service budget to the new USWFS raises serious questions about the agency’s ability to meet its broader mission, including timber and other natural resource management targets.

Investing in Prevention Is More Cost-Effective Than Creating a New Agency

- The root causes of catastrophic wildland fire—overly dense forests, wildland-urban interface development, and changing weather patterns—require integrated land management solutions, not a new bureaucracy.
- Spending limited resources on active forest management (thinning, prescribed fire, fuels reduction) and improving existing systems will deliver greater results than billions spent standing up a new federal agency.
- Adequate agency staffing across the full land management workforce is key to addressing these variables effectively.