

File Code: 1300
Route To:

Date: September 15, 2000

Subject: Fire Rehabilitation and Restoration

To: All Employees

Cool weather and rain are helping to slow the wildfires that have caused so much disruption this summer. I thank the thousands of Forest Service employees, retirees, and families for sacrifices made to help protect communities and natural resources this summer. You have my personal appreciation and the thanks of the American people.

On September 9, President Clinton accepted the Interagency Report: *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*. Michael Rains, Director of the Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Program, and Tim Hartzell of the Bureau of Land Management, deserve credit for its development along with Under Secretary Jim Lyons and Deputy Secretary of the Interior David Hayes. Thanks to all the others who laid the foundation for the Report. The Report will help ensure that we have the resources for firefighting operations, short-term emergency rehabilitation of communities and ecosystems damaged by fire, and long-term protection and restoration of communities and ecosystems at risk. The Report also highlights the imperative of enhanced state and private efforts to reduce hazardous fuel accumulations on non-federal lands and reduce fire risk to homes and property through programs such as FIREWISE. If you haven't read this Report or the President's address, I encourage you to do so. The report can be accessed through <http://www.fs.fed.us> and the President's radio address can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

Last week in Missoula, Montana, the National Leadership Team developed the following principles to guide our efforts as we implement *Managing the Impact of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment*:

1. Assist state and local partners to take actions to reduce fire risk to homes and private property through programs such as FIREWISE.
2. Focus rehabilitation efforts on restoring watershed function including, protection of basic soil, water resources, biological communities, and prevention of invasive species.
3. Assign highest priority for hazardous fuels reduction to communities at risk, readily accessible municipal watersheds, threatened and endangered species habitat, and other important local features, where conditions favor uncharacteristically intense fires.
4. Restore healthy, diverse, and resilient ecological systems to minimize uncharacteristically intense fires on a priority watershed basis. Methods will

- include removal of excessive vegetation and dead fuels through thinning, prescribed fire, and other treatment methods.
5. Focus on achieving the desired future condition on the land in collaboration with communities, interest groups, and state and federal agencies. Streamline process, maximize effectiveness, use an ecologically conservative approach, and minimize controversy in accomplishing restoration projects.
 6. Monitor to evaluate the effectiveness of various treatments to reduce unnaturally intense fires while restoring forest ecosystem health and watershed function.
 7. Encourage new stewardship industries and collaborate with local people, volunteers, Youth Conservation Corps members, service organizations, and Forest Service work crews, as appropriate.
 8. Focus research on the long-term effectiveness of different restoration and rehabilitation methods to determine those methods most effective in protecting and restoring watershed function and forest health. Seek new uses and markets for byproducts of restoration.

The Report calls for strong national oversight as we begin implementation. In the interim, I have asked Michael Rains to continue as the Forest Service lead to begin the implementation phase, as collateral duties to his current position. He will be assisted by Denny Truesdale, Assistant to the Deputy Chief, State and Private Forestry. We are counting on the existing field structure and a wide range of partners to ensure we meet our goals.

In many cases, accomplishing our restoration objectives will entail removal of brush and other small diameter low value wood products. Merchantable material generated as a byproduct of restoration may be sold. Explore non-traditional methods such as service contracts which can provide local jobs, accomplish land management objectives and help protect communities.

Some will attempt to use the 2000 fire season to argue for more or less commercial or salvage timber harvest on National Forests. History has taught us that these debates are counterproductive. Commercial timber sales accomplished with existing funding remain a viable stewardship tool provided they contribute to achieving long-term goals, but they are not the only method. We must focus on long-term goals and achieving the desired future conditions on the land, and reducing excessive fuels build-ups that in combination with extreme weather result in uncharacteristically intense fires.

The social and economic disruptions caused by this year's fires are tragic. They also, however, provide a tremendous opportunity to build a constituency for restoration based on the long-term needs of the land. Our progress will be measured by our ability to make a difference on the land, streamline process, and help people learn about the role of fire in healthy and diverse ecosystems. If we are successful, our efforts will provide local jobs,

help protect communities and improve the health of the land. I appreciate your hard work.

MIKE DOMBECK
Chief