



12 May 2020

TO: Fire Executive Council

FROM: Leon Ben, Jr., Chair, Fire Management Board

SUBJECT: Fire Management Board Priorities for the 2020 Wildland Fire Year

This memo communicates to executive leadership the FMB's collective high-level priorities and to assist with departmental level discussions and briefings. The priorities will be revisited by the FMB to validate or update as necessary.

Health & Safety – The safety of our wildland firefighters is always our top priority. The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has altered the way we are approaching the 2020 wildland fire year. The FMB has established the COVID-19 Wildland Fire Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT). MPHAT will address medical and health-related issues specific to the interagency administration of mission critical wildland fire management functions. The tasking includes:

- Providing medical and public health expertise and advice
- Coordination and collaboration with external subject matter experts
- Developing protocols and practices for all aspects of COVID-19 planning, prevention and mitigation for wildland fire operations

Wildland Fire Response – The National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC) developed a tasking for three Area Command teams to work with the geographic area coordinating groups on developing respective wildland fire response plans with final products presented on May 4, 2020. The interagency wildland fire community is working to ensure the plans are in place for responses to wildland fire to ensure we are prepared to maintain a viable workforce for initial attack, extended attack and large fire support. The plans contain guidance and best management practices for developing protocols to address potential COVID-19 exposure incidents; for incident management teams to mitigate COVID-19 exposure; and to manage a response in an area with a known exposure to COVID-19.

Federal Wildland Firefighting Workforce Onboarding and Training – Efforts are ongoing to ensure the firefighting workforce is ready and prepared to engage. This is a priority for all agencies. The hiring and re-hiring of firefighters is a high priority for each agency. The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Department of the Interior and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) have issued guidance pertaining to the on-boarding of new hires which will assist in reducing COVID-19 exposure-related staffing challenges. In addition, the FMB issued two memoranda which extend annual certifications through the end of the 2020 calendar year. They include the annual refresher training for all red card positions, the work capacity test, medical standards and aviation-related certifications and training.

External Firefighting Capacity – It is anticipated the interagency wildland firefighting workforce (Federal, State, Tribal and local) will be impacted by the COVID-19 as firefighters become infected, isolated or quarantined. In addition, other COVID-19 related impacts come in the form of Mission Assignments under FEMA's Emergency Support Function #4 authority. Currently, wildland firefighters

are filling resource orders to support COVID-19 related assignments. Wildland fire anticipates filling Mission Assignments under ESF #4 throughout the fire season. In past fire years with extensive large fires which commit the bulk of traditional firefighting capacity, NMAC has requested the Department of Defense (DOD) mobilize active duty military to augment wildfire response capability. This has historically occurred once National Preparedness Level 4 or 5 has been reached and when National Guard capability has been exceeded. This fire year, with respect to anticipated impacts of COVID-19 on wildland firefighter capacity, conversations with DoD have emphasized the potential of requesting assistance.

We have also been in contact with our international partners in Australia and Canada, sharing our efforts in preparedness planning, development of guidelines and best management practices, and mitigating risk for the health and safety of our workforce with respect to COVID-19. This is critically important to inform and have an understanding of each other's efforts in the interest of alignment and our ability to share resources.

Firefighter Mobilization Coordination – The interagency community is working together on a mobilization protocol that incorporates mitigations relative to COVID-19. NMAC is working with the interagency geographic area coordination centers to evaluate the current planning level to reflect the response capability due to the challenges and safe and efficient employee mobilization during COVID-19. Processes exist for state-to-state assistance as well as interstate federal firefighting response but may be compromised or delayed if inconsistencies exist from one jurisdiction to the next.

FMB memoranda are available on the Firenet [website](#). This is an unprecedented time and we are working diligently with our interagency, state, and local partners to meet these challenges while responding to wildfires.

Distribution:

Fire Management Board Members
National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group Members
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