

administrators, and the public is focused on the cost of fighting large wildfires. Recently, the General Accounting Office has been directed to review 1994 fire suppression expenditures in some agencies.

Some critics believe expenditures are excessive and that the crisis nature of wildfire has led to imprudent use of personnel, equipment, and supplies. Others believe that firefighting practices are not as effective as some natural forces in bringing wildfires under control and that fire suppression efforts should take better advantage of weather, terrain, fuel, and other natural conditions. In the future there is likely to be less tolerance for excessive expenditures on large-fire suppression. This type of fire activity must be analyzed for costs versus benefits. Present analysis methods have not resulted in improved practices or reinforced confidence in current suppression strategies.

Goal

A means is developed with which to demonstrate overall fire management economic efficiency as well as to analyze the relative efficiency of specific activities within the fire management program.

Action

Federal agencies will:

- Jointly develop a standard methodology for measuring and reporting fire management economic efficiency that includes commodity, non-commodity, and social values. This methodology should specifically address, among other considerations, the cost of large-fire suppression.

- Base fire management and fire program activities on economic efficiencies developed by using sound economic analysis methodologies.

Organizational Alternatives

The current focus on reinvention of the Federal government is stimulating new approaches to accomplishing agency missions. As part of this effort, Federal agencies must evaluate their fire management organizations and methods of accomplishing their total fire management program. These analyses must consider the movement to reduce the Federal role in public service, the implications of a continued reduction in work force and skills, and the effectiveness and efficiency of fire management organizations and methods, while at the same time retaining strong principles of public service. Any change in organizations or responsibilities must bring the same or better fire management service to the

public and meet the goals and objectives of the agencies' land use plans.

Each Federal agency currently maintains its own separate fire management organization, with qualified employees from other programs available as the fire situation dictates. This is commonly termed the fire militia. Federal agencies and cooperators also share resources nationally, and in some cases local interagency fire organizations exist, contract services are used, or other innovative approaches, such as the National Interagency Fire Center, the National Wildfire Coordinating Group, and the Alaska Fire Service, are being developed or used to accomplish the fire management mission. The Federal fire work force is currently decreasing at an uncomfortable rate, particularly in key specialized skills. An anticipated increase in retirements of fire managers and specialists over the next five years raises a serious question about how agencies will conduct their fire management missions. More aggressive examination and implementation of organizational alternatives are hampered by the inability to measure relative efficiencies among these alternatives as well as by strong traditions that create a resistance to change.

Goal

The most efficient and effective fire management program for Federal resources is developed, using an appropriate analysis procedure.

Actions

Federal agencies will conduct a comprehensive, cooperative analysis of their fire management programs and consider a broad range of alternatives, including non-Federal fire management services provided by Tribes, State or local governments, or private interests. The agencies will focus on developing a consistent analytical approach and evaluate alternatives against well-founded criteria. This analysis will be directed toward achieving the same or improved level of service, and at a minimum each alternative will explore funding mechanisms, specific wildfire suppression activities, and fire management in the wildland/urban interface. Each alternative will include the variables of funding the total program and funding by the benefitting party.

Data Management

Accurate, organized, and accessible information about natural resources and fire activities is the basis for coordinated agency program decisions and is critical

to effective and efficient program management.

There is currently no consistency among agencies in compiling, managing, and accessing fire data, which prevents a reliable, holistic view of the Federal fire program. Although some data, such as historical fire patterns, response to past management actions, resource values, prescribed fire statistics, and hazard mapping, have been collected, it is incomplete and is not managed and portrayed consistently. In some cases, e.g., the wildland/urban interface, the need for data is only now being identified.

Goal Federal agencies adhere to sound data management principles and achieve a coordinated Federal fire statistical database.

Actions

Federal agencies will:

- Standardize fire statistics and develop an easily accessible common database.

- Jointly identify, develop, and use tools needed for ecosystem-based fire management programs with mechanisms to integrate fire-related databases with other systems. These tools will include:

- The collection of ecosystem-related data such as disturbance regimes, historical fire patterns, response to management actions, and others.

- Consistent methods to track and access fire information, e.g., fire-use statistics and administrative costs.

- Mechanisms to transfer and exchange information such as fire effects databases (e.g., Fire Effects Information System), expert systems (e.g., Fire Monitoring Navigator), Internet access, National Biological Information Infrastructure, National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Publications Management System documents, multimedia training and educational material, and public/private partnership information.

- Direct the collection of a common set of prescribed fire data for use in risk assessment.

Cooperate with the Tribes, States, and local governments to establish a data-collection mechanism, which includes involvement by the insurance industry, National Fire Protection Association, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and other Federal agencies, to better assess the nature and scope of the wildland/urban interface fire problem.

- Play a lead role in the adoption of the National Fire Incident Reporting System standards for all fire agencies that operate in the wildland/urban interface and modify existing fire