

reports (Interior's DI-1202 and Forest Service's 5100-29) to reflect wildland/urban interface data.

### Weather Support

Fire-weather forecasting is a sophisticated and long-standing tool used by fire managers. As fire behavior prediction techniques have improved and become paramount in fire suppression, weather support has become a critical factor. In addition, longer-term fires are demanding forecasts beyond the six- to ten-day reliable range.

Currently, fire weather services are provided, on request, by the National Weather Service as a special program in that agency; however, demands for weather support have begun to exceed the existing capability. In recent severe fire years, requests for on-the-fire units could not always be filled.

The need for nontraditional weather support is dramatically increasing. Pre-fire-season predictions are being demanded by managers in order to prioritize work loads. Long-range fire severity forecasts are commonly needed for pre-positioning suppression forces, but they are either not available or unreliable. Finally, current and future demands for prescribed-fire weather forecasts, both long-range and on-site, are far exceeding present weather-support capability. To date, evaluation of alternatives for providing weather support to the fire management program have not resulted in substantive change in the methods available to fire managers.

### Goal

Appropriate options are implemented for fulfilling fire managers' current and future needs for weather services.

### Actions

- The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, together with the Secretary of Commerce, will evaluate alternative methods, including non-Federal sources, to provide weather service to the agencies' fire management programs.
- The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture will seek commitment from the Secretary of Commerce to research and develop technology to provide accurate, long-range weather forecasts.

### Legal Review and Policy Analysis

New and innovative fire program activities and the increasing interconnection between fire activities and existing environmental, public health, and tort laws require legal review and policy analysis to ensure coordination and compliance. Consequences of prescribed fire

activities, where fire is allowed to play a natural role or is introduced into the wildlands, may conflict with some interpretations of existing laws or regulations. Currently, these differences are identified independently by each agency and resolved on a case-by-case basis.

Many of these issues are emerging in the wildland/urban interface zone (see Wildland/Urban Interface Protection section). In order to make the best possible decisions, agencies must have sound, consistent legal interpretation of laws and regulations and/or in-depth systematic analysis of policy. Furthermore, wildland fire management agencies must, early in the process, involve public-health and environmental regulators in developing the most workable application of policies and regulations.

### Goal

Agencies have a consistent interpretation of laws and resulting policies to eliminate inconsistencies in agency fire management programs and decisions.

### Actions

- Federal agencies will:
  - Identify the legal context for reintroducing fire into wildlands and develop options for accomplishment, including modifying regulations to address ecological processes where appropriate, exercising broader interpretations of policy, using the waiver process, or resolving obstacles at regional and local levels.
  - Jointly obtain legal interpretation of current policy and law regarding interagency implementation activities related to fire management, including those on non-Federal lands. Based on this interpretation, agencies can develop standardized agreements or new agreements that permit these activities.
  - Clarify and differentiate between agency liability and personal liability resulting from prescribed fire, based on legal review and interpretation of tort law.
    - The Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture will direct the Office of the Solicitor and the Office of the General Counsel, in coordination with the Department of Justice, to conduct and publish, by January 1, 1996, a comprehensive legal review on wildland/urban interface fire protection to provide the legal foundation for Federal actions. This review will address:
      - Current authority under Federal laws such as the Organic Act, National

Forest Management Act, Stafford Act, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

- The subjects of tort liability, budget authorities, cooperative agreements, mitigation activities, and natural resource protection/environmental laws.

### Role of Fire in Resource Management Situation

Long before humans arrived in North America, there was fire. It came with the first lightning strike and will remain forever. Wildfire is inherently neither good nor bad. As an inevitable natural force, it is simply unpredictable and potentially destructive and, along with human activities, has altered ecosystems throughout time.

Early ecologists recognized the presence of disturbance but focused on the principle that the land continued to move toward a stable or equilibrium condition. Through the years, however, scientists have acknowledged that equilibrium conditions are largely the exception and disturbance is generally the rule. Natural forces have affected and defined landscapes throughout time. Inasmuch as humans cannot completely control or eliminate these disturbances, ecosystems will continue to change.

Human activities have also influenced ecosystem change. American Indian Tribes actively used fire in prehistoric and historic times to alter vegetation patterns. In short, people and fire and ecosystems evolved together. This human influence shifted after European settlement in North America, when it was believed that fire, unlike other natural disturbance phenomena, could and should be controlled. For many years fire was aggressively excluded to prevent what was considered the destruction of forests and other vegetation. While the destructive, potentially deadly side of fire was obvious and immediate, changes and risks resulting from these fire exclusion efforts were difficult to recognize and mounted slowly and inconspicuously over many decades.

Recently, however, there has been a growing recognition that past land-use practices such as logging and grazing, combined with the effects of fire exclusion, have resulted in heavy accumulations of dead vegetation, altered fuel arrangement, and changes in vegetative structure and composition. As dead fallen material (including tree boles, tree and shrub branches, leaves, and decaying organic matter) accumulates on the ground, it increases fuel quantity and creates a continuous