



File Code: 5100**Date:** June 22, 2020**Route To:****Subject:** Learning and Updates for the 2020 Fire Year**To:** Regional Foresters, Station Directors, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs and WO Directors

In the Forest Service we strive to be a learning organization. That means we challenge ourselves to build a shared vision, embrace systems thinking and learn together as a team. In the 2020 fire year it is more important than ever before that we model these behaviors and adapt and update our processes and protocols rapidly.

Firefighters are adapting every day as they train and deploy together every year and this year it's especially important to share what we are learning as close to real-time as possible. After Action Reviews conducted by crews and research conducted by our Human Performance team are encouraging open conversation and highlighting gaps we need to address, learn, adjust and make course correction as we go. I could not be prouder of this agency and the way we are living our core value of Service during these extremely challenging times.

In the two months since I issued the Chief's 2020 letter of intent for wildland fire we have established with our partners nine Geographic Area Plans: <https://www.nifc.gov/fireInfo/covid-19.htm> to guide firefighting during the COVID-19 pandemic; the interagency Fire Management Board has issued over 20 memos: <https://sites.google.com/a/firenet.gov/fmb/home/information/memorandums/fmb-memorandums-2020> with updated protocols and procedures; an interagency team of medical experts has been established to guide us in this uncharted territory; we have initiated an interagency peer sharing process for incident management personnel to share best practices for managing large fires specific to adjustments due to COVID-19; and as of June 19, 2020 we engaged 1,908 fires on 945,827 acres of National Forest System lands as well as supported our partners on their fires. We are anchoring to our intent, as laid out in my letter, to "evolve, learn and adapt as the situation changes" and to hear "what works and what doesn't directly from firefighters." To that end, we have heard from line officers, firefighters, and our partners that some of our key objectives need to be further clarified and updates shared.

As such, I want to be clear that this year our objective on all fires is the safety of our firefighters. To that end and to minimize the spread of COVID-19, we will **aggressively initial attack** all fires using local resources to the maximum extent possible. When local resources are not adequate to staff all ignitions, priorities will be set to address fires with the most values at risk. To best ensure availability of local resources for high priority ignitions, fires with few values at risk may have a minimal response. When fires escape initial attack we "commit resources only when there is a reasonable expectation of success in protecting life and critical property and



infrastructure.” In other words, we won’t put firefighters in harm’s way unless we know they can be successful in their objectives. We will move resources across the country to respond to fires, especially those that escape initial attack - just as we do any other year. Should fire conditions become severe, interagency assessments and coordination processes will serve to bolster local forces in preparing for initial attack with prepositioning of ground based and aviation resources. We are also investing in enhanced data analysis to better prioritize resources where we have the greatest chance for success containing fires that threaten the highest value assets and most critical infrastructure.

We also know best practices when it comes to testing and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) continue to be updated the more we learn about the COVID-19 virus. We depend on the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the interagency Medical and Public Health Advisory Team (MPHAT) made up of doctors from across the interagency community to advise us. We know that testing is an important component of our COVID-19 strategy but it cannot supersede the practice of physical distancing and face coverings we have already recommended. We are evaluating a strategy recommended by the CDC where we prioritize testing for those who are symptomatic and have had direct exposure. Let me assure you that as CDC testing recommendations and guidance change we will incorporate those changes into our strategy.

Working with the Department of Agriculture and our interagency partners we have stocked the fire caches with PPE, including sanitizers and masks. We are committed to ensuring that all of our firefighters are properly equipped before they go to work on a fire and will continue to build up our reserves of PPE using all procurement flexibilities available to us and working with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

We remain committed to protecting the health and safety of our employees and the American people we serve and while considering the additional hazards presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, we will strive to carry out our core wildfire mission responsibilities. Thank you for all you do.

X 

For

Signed by: KATHERINE ARMSTRONG