



The Lookout

Information, Observations and Comments from the
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

Sustaining the Heritage

A SPECIAL EDITION

The following message from Al West, Chair of the NAFSR Fire Committee will up date you on the status of the committee's work. The final report will also be distributed as a special edition of THE LOOKOUT.

NAFSR FIRE COMMITTEE STATUS REPORT

I want to bring everyone up to date on Fire Committee activities and the direction of involvement in which we appear to be heading. This is the first time I have written to all of you at the same time, so let me review the background up to this point.

During last year's NAFSR annual meeting, the board agreed to establish a fire committee to respond to numerous concerns expressed by retirees and others. The concerns focused on what appeared to be changes in fire policies and how they were being implemented. The Wildland Fire Use (WFU) and Appropriate Management Response (AMR) policies were the center of concern but there were others. Many retirees described several incidents that caused severe watershed and other resource damage, excessive costs, along with increasingly larger fires than should have occurred. Several of you provided examples of what was happening.

Following the meeting Darrel contacted, or heard, from several people and asked if they would be willing to assist in various ways to work with the current Forest Service Management Teams. My understanding is that each of you have agreed to be involved in various degrees. If not let me know or tell me your interest level.

Darrell asked me to chair the committee and we met with a small group during last year's SAF meeting in Reno. We were charged with developing a Problem Statement and I was asked to interact with Tom Harbour, Director of Fire and Aviation Management. I gathered the many e-mails, reports and other documents that you, many other retirees and others had been sending back and forth. It was a sizable collection of extremely well written and thoughtfully compiled experiences. I appreciate all those received and especially thank John Marker and Darrel for making sure they forwarded all that came their way.

A small core committee that includes Steve Eubanks, Jim Golden, Gordie Schmidt and myself prepared a draft problem statement that is currently being revised based on the input from the core team and a few others. I felt it should not be

finalized until after a series of contacts with Fire Management. That has now occurred and a rewrite should be done in the next 30 days and will be shared with all of you for comments and suggested changes.

George Leonard and I have been involved with several communications with the Chief, Deputy Chief of State & Private Forestry, Director of Fire Management and most of his top staff. I have also had personal conversations with Tom Harbour and we have exchanged several e-mails. George has met personally with the Chief, Jim Hubbard, Deputy Chief S&PF, and his Associate Deputy. In addition, George travelled to the Washington Office to be present when we had two major conference calls with the Director, Deputy Director, Associate Directors and other key Fire Management Staff. In addition I met personally with the Deputy Director on his recent trip to California.

My observation is that the Chief's office has listened to our concerns, has provided us with requested information and has been open to our suggestions. We are continuing the dialog and we will work together to develop an action plan that will utilize the experiences of retirees. Fire and Aviation Management has been positive in working with the NAFSR scheduling conference calls, meetings, and understanding the sincerity of issues raised. At the same time we did express our concerns that they are constantly changing policies and the intent does not appear to be understood by local line officers. They are trying to overcome this situation with a number of regional and forest level meetings. The new NIMO teams are being used for some of this exchange at the forest level. Time however is short as they try to make a number of changes for the 2009 fire season. In other words, be ready to go by the end of May. These training and briefing sessions are situations we have discussed to which the fire committee members may be able to contribute.

Among the change is to go back to just two types of fire—"Planned Ignitions" (prescribed fire) and "Unplanned ignitions" (wildfire) instead of the current three kinds of fires—"Wildfire (unwanted), "Prescribed Fire" (management ignitions) and "Wildland Fire Use" (natural ignitions). They are replacing the "Wildland Fire Situation Analysis" (WFSA) with a new analytical and methodology called "Wildland Fire Decision Support System" (WFDSS). In addition it does not appear that the field has full understanding of the consequences of decisions related to implementing the appropriate management response (AMR). Overall we are concerned with the implementation of policy changes, including the involvement and understanding of Line Officers in their essential role in making decisions related to fire management actions on their units.

Tentatively we are discussing potential retirees' role in implementing Fire Policy changes at Regional and Forest level meetings. We are also discussing how retirees can be part of NIMO Teams' pre-fire contacts with forests. Finally, we have discussed "Hot Fire Reviews" and how retirees can be involved. We do not at this time feel there is an urgency to review past fires.

In summary let me say I believe Forest Service management has heard our concerns and wants to solicit our help. It is important we move beyond the past and help the agency do what is right for the land and people. We all worked so hard to fulfill the Forest Service Mission and want to make sure it continues into the future.

As the next phase develops I will keep you informed. In the meantime, please give me your comments.

Al West, Chair

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