

WFSA for Agency Administrators

- The WFSA strategy and direction it provides – particularly when considering firefighter and public safety are considered - may be the single most important decision a line officer makes regarding a wildland fire.
- If the fire can be kept small do it - and support the efforts. If it can't, admit it and move on with determining what will work.
- Poorly considered, developed, and monitored WFSA's with inappropriate or unrealistic direction can result in enormous commitments of fire suppression forces against overwhelming odds. The accumulation of hazardous fuels over 10's of millions of acres which have been reacting with drought cycles must be addressed head-on and assessed.
- Unnecessary exposure of firefighters to the hazards of the wildland fire environment is the result of WFSA direction to implement strategies which simply will not be effective until conditions change. Social and political pressure to be aggressive will be intense.
- The WFSA process is designed to bring out creative thinking focused on a unique situation. No two large fires are identical and no school solution will apply perfectly to any. The current software may not be favored by some – but used correctly, by knowledgeable teams, it facilitates the kind of thinking needed. It can perform for complex as well as less complex fire situations. It makes sensitivity analysis possible, leading to quick adjustments of an analysis that can document and daylight your decision.
- The line officer should consider the momentum initiated by the WFSA, the commitment of fire suppression forces, money, and the effect on land and resource values that result from their decision, and the inertia that commitment to a weak or ineffective WFSA usually produces before a more appropriate strategy is adopted.
- The charge of too “complex and too time consuming” has been hung on the current process by many reviewers. Today's fires **are complex, expensive, and dangerous**; due diligence by today's line officers should expect an analysis that can measure up to the incident at hand. Once again - no two fires are the same. Some will require a simple and straight forward analysis – unfortunately many of our fires will be less than simple and straight forward. *“These are not your father's fires”*.

- Do not rely on a strategy that is “based on hope” – no one wants a large fire on their unit; the reality is that they will occur and the notion of some kind of failure only feeds the development of unrealistic expectations.
- Think of the WFSA analysis as progressive – initial WFSA likely will be different than subsequent versions that will be done as the fire situation/complexity/costs escalate. Resist the trap of chasing the fire with the WFSA.
- Designate WFSA analyst(s) and team members (a minimum number of individuals who can think critically about the big issues related to the fire) in advance of fire season with the expectation they will be there when you need them.
- Insist that prework is done – you can not wait until the smoke is in the air!
- Gather the needed data (costs, management area direction) objectives tailored to fire location long before fire season – and then practice with it.
- Consider developing templates where appropriate that are tailored to the watershed. Describe objectives and priorities within a landscape – these can then be used to develop alternatives in advance. They can be adjusted to meet current and projected fire behavior once the fire starts. It is faster to adjust and revise than construct!
- Understand policy
- Approval – is different than certification. Forest Supervisors authorize an alternative, higher level management is certifying the processes are correct and approve funding for the target outcome of the alternative selected.
- Focus on those items in the form of Category/Objectives and weighting and ranking development that convey your intentions.
- As should be expected, as estimated costs go up, so to will the fiscal oversight
- Documentation of decisions needs to be commensurate with certification level, document why and why not, ensure that the probability process (success and failure estimate) is understood and documented.
- Get help
- Have staff at the local, regional, and national levels who know what needs to be done and will be there when you need them – be willing to seek help, just as you do when requesting an IMT to help manage an incident.
- Strive to manage the incident – this is a different role than suppressing the fire – the Incident Commander was hired to do that.

Factors which contribute to a **STRONG** WFSA include:

- Firefighter and public safety is recognized throughout the process.
- A realistic assessment of fire location and spread potential, how current and future weather affects spread, fire suppression resources availability and capability is used.
- Realistic time frames are used.
- Realistic costs and resource values are used.
- Environmental resource issues are appropriately identified and considered.
- Social and political issues are recognized and addressed.
- Constraints are identified and their impacts are considered and clearly understood.

Factors which contribute to a **WEAK** WFSA include:

- Planning for and calculating effectiveness of suppression forces that are not available, or underestimating the number or kind of forces required to achieve the objectives set forth by the planned strategy.
- Unrealistic time estimates to put suppression forces on the fire.
- Over estimating the effectiveness of suppression forces that are available.

Large Fire Suppression Costs

The cost of suppressing large wildland fires has, over the last decade, been accelerating to levels which are unprecedented, even considering inflation. Too many variables have influenced this trend to detail, however the line officer should be aware of the significance placed on large fire cost management and the potential scrutiny which a large wildland fire will be subjected to review and ensure effective cost management, beginning with the WFSA.

Cost management should be considered as prudent selection of strategies and application of tactics to achieve implementable objectives which are effective and efficient. Cost management does not include accepting shortcuts which compromise firefighter or public safety.