

## Lowden Fire Task Group Report

The Task Group was ask to explore several Lowden Prescribed Fire Review issues and their relation to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) prescribed fire operations and report its findings. A 5-person task group assembled on January 15, 2000, at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho:

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Keith Satterfield - R-1 Prescribed Fire Specialist, Little Pend Oreille NWR  
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The following are the findings and recommendations from the Task Group:

1. Define "escape" and develop reporting procedures and communication processes.

A fire escaping the planned perimeter of the burn unit is potentially only one of many Prescribed Fire Plan elements that indicate a prescribed fire has exceeded or is anticipated to exceed planned limits and needs to be reclassified as a wildland fire. The scope and extent any planning element exceeds prescriptive criteria are site dependent. For example, a minor slopover across the burn perimeter that can be extinguished by forces on hand may cause ignition sequences to be temporarily suspended and may generate a re-evaluation of the burn implementation, but by itself may not be not considered an escape that would be declared a wildfire. But if contingency forces were called in to battle the slopover, that probably would necessitate conversion to wildfire status. Each individual Prescribed Fire Plan should clearly define what contingency actions constitute a significant departure from what was planned or expected and where conversion to a wildland fire is appropriate.

In addition to recognizing when conditions exceed or are anticipated to exceed planned limits, it is important to alert others to this situation. Informal communication should work effectively on a local basis. Establishing a formal interagency process at the State or Geographical Area Coordination Group level would assure broadening the communications network.

Altering the perception that a "successful burn" is one that achieves the target acreage to one that successfully executed the plan would remove the stigma of "losing a fire" and improve communications of important information. Successful implementation of the contingency portion of the Prescribed Fire Plan should be rewarded.

2. Assure all Prescribed Fire Plans are developed by qualified (define) individuals, and assure there is independent technical review of all Prescribed Fire Plans.

After assessing existing Prescribed Fire Plan development and review procedures and guidance, the task group recommends all regions conform to the following minimum

Prescribed Fire Plan development and review qualifications and procedures:

- A. All Prescribed Fire Plans should ideally be prepared and developed by an interdisciplinary team in which at a minimum at least one member has have successfully completed the FWS Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation or NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss training course.
- B. Rather than assure an **independent** technical review of Prescribed Fire Plans, regional review and concurrence processes must be established to insure **competent**, technical reviews take place. All new or previously developed Prescribed Fire Plans should be subject to the established regional review process during the scheduled year of implementation including a new signature page for previously developed plans.
- C. Prescribed Fire Plan review should be based on the prescribed fire complexity analysis. At a minimum
  - Low or moderate complexity prescribed fires should be reviewed by a NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 2.
  - High complexity prescribed fires should be reviewed by a NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss Type 1.
  - For prescribed fires involving aviation operations, the appropriate NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss reviewing the plan should also have prescribed fire operational aviation experience.

If the Prescribed Fire Plan **was not** developed by a currently qualified NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss at the appropriate type, the technical review has to be by a **currently qualified** NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss at the appropriate type. If the Prescribed Fire Plan **was** developed by a currently qualified NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss at the appropriate type, the technical review can be by a **previously qualified** NWCG Prescribed Fire Burn Boss at the appropriate type.

3. Assure availability of contingency forces.

This can best be achieved by:

- A. Defining the number and type of contingency forces needed in the Prescribed Fire Plan.
- B. Validating their potential availability immediately before committing to the prescribed fire. A critical element in the Go No-go checklist.
- C. Maintain communications concerning any change in the availability of contingency forces throughout Prescribed Fire Plan implementation and prepare to modify plan implementation if necessary.

4. Assure fire severity (drought) is adequately addressed in Prescribed Fire Plans.

Current policy and guidance about addressing drought and the effects of drought in Prescribed Fire Plans are adequate. Additional actions should be taken to educate

Service employees and develop drought baseline information:

- " Check to assure the effects of drought on prescribed fire operations and objectives is adequately addressed in the FWS Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation training course. If not, add appropriate material and information.
- " Develop appropriate historic (baseline) drought indices on all refuges where drought effects have been identified as a concern.
- " Assure that the prescriptive criteria for drought are as well understood and taken as seriously as those for weather or fire behavior.
- " Improve local and regional partner communications concerning the onset and mitigation of sustained below normal soil and large fuel moisture.
- " Coordinate green up effects in areas where live fuels dominate fire behavior.