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Briefing Statement
An Interagency Social Science Plan to Assist Federal Fire Management

Federal land management agencies have increasingly integrated ecosystem management principles into both their agency missions and resource practices. The challenge for these agencies is to sustain healthy, resilient, fire-dependent ecosystems that also support significant human activity. As resource managers apply science-based decision making, they require a sound understanding of the human dimensions of fire management as well as the principles of ecosystem management. This knowledge is best derived from a well-designed and effectively implemented program of social science research. In addition, the extraordinary fire season of summer 2000 provides compelling evidence of the relationship between wildland fire and people, and the need for sound information to make land management decisions.

A major interagency effort is currently underway, supported by the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fish and Wildlife Service, and USDA Forest Service. The purpose of this project is to develop an interagency social science plan for the human dimensions of fire management. The plan will assist fire managers by: 1) describing the rationale and benefits of social science research related to the human dimensions of fire management, 2) outlining a multi-year research agenda, and 3) recommending key strategies that agencies can take to implement the needed social science actions.

The scope of the plan is limited to the human dimensions of fire management in the United States as practiced by the participating federal agencies. The plan includes the full range of fire management topics and will deal with all of the primary social science disciplines as well as interdisciplinary research. It will focus on research, but include technical assistance and education (technology transfer) needs as well. The plan is to be national in scale, with the flexibility for regional variation in research needs.

The plan will be based on three key foundations. They are: 1) a review of existing social science literature on the human dimensions of fire management, 2) an analysis of social science needs as expressed in the existing policies and regulations of participating agencies, and 3) a needs assessment based on input from representatives of three important end-users of the proposed research – a) the relevant social science community, b) fire and resource managers in the participating agencies, and c) state and local communities, governments, and non-government organizations impacted by federal fire management.

Opportunities for participation in the needs assessment have included: 1) a series of interactive workshops held throughout the country, and 2) a web site for electronic comments from stakeholders. A draft of the plan will be available in late July 2001 for wide review and comment. To request a copy of the draft to review, please contact Dr. Gary Machlis, gmachlis@uidaho.edu.

The final plan (to be completed Fall 2001) will include a research agenda for the future that describes what research is needed, why it's needed, and how the research will benefit the agencies and the public. It will also include basic recommendations on what activities need to be undertaken to accomplish the research agenda and ensure that research results are integrated into decision-making. These recommendations will be prioritized as appropriate, and could be used by agency administrators to develop individual or joint action plans.

The work is being done under the cooperative agreement between the National Park Service and the University of Idaho (UI) Cooperative Park Studies Unit (CPSU). For more information, please contact Dr. Gary Machlis, 208/885-7129 or gmachlis@uidaho.edu or Amanda Kaplan, 206/220-4150 or amanda_kaplan@nps.gov.