

Briefing:
State Fire Protection Policy
for Private Structures



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DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

DIVISION OF FORESTRY

In 1992, DNR adopted a policy stating that wildland fire would be managed according to the protection level for the surrounding lands even when structures may be threatened. Therefore, fires that may threaten structures are allowed to burn in some areas. This policy has been discussed a number of times, including at the fall DOF and interagency fire reviews. However, it has never been fully implemented, and we have continued to fight fires that threaten any structures.

We will fully implement the 1992 policy beginning this season. The policy is the department's position, including the position of the main land manager, the Division of Land. It is also consistent with the state's efforts to reduce fire suppression costs and maintain productive wildlife habitat by allowing the fire to burn where appropriate.

Guidance for implementing the policy follows.

Implementation in 1997. This fire season we will implement the 1992 policy. Decisions on fire response should be consistent with the current interagency fire management plan for your area.

Critical sites. If a structure is designated a critical site, continue to manage it as critical site.

Limited and Modified areas. If a structure is not designated a critical site, fires that threaten the structure should be managed consistent with the fire protection level on the surrounding land. In Limited areas or Modified areas that have converted, the default action is to not protect the structure. If a fire would not be suppressed if the structure were not present, it should not be suppressed because of the structure unless there are mitigating conditions. For example, suppression action may be appropriate if the structure is inhabited, if it is a historic site, etc. Such actions are departures from the fire plan (see below).

Inhabited structures. If a structure is inhabited, we will take appropriate action to protect the people on the scene. Such actions may include evacuation, protecting the structure, or other responses, depending on the situation.

Departures from the fire plan. This policy does not change suppression agencies' authority to depart from selected management options in the interagency fire management plans. As always, an area forester or FMO that decides to depart from the selected option should notify the land manager/owner and document the reasons for the departure in writing. All departures will be reviewed by the state Fire Operations Forester.

Native allotments. We are obligated to protect Native allotments to the level designated by the federal government. The allotments are typically identified in interagency fire management plans as full or critical sites, and the federal government pays the costs for fire suppression on these sites.

Fire plan updates. When the interagency fire plans are next reviewed, DOF should work with the Division of Land to ensure that protection levels for state, municipal, and private lands are appropriate, given this policy. The agencies should also ensure that critical site designations on these lands are used consistently. Not all structures will be designated as critical sites.