

**To:** Chief, United States Wildland Fire Service  
Director, Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Director, Bureau of Land Management  
Director, National Park Service  
Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

**From:** Doug Burgum, Secretary of the Interior

**Date:** April 8, 2026

**Subject:** 2026 Wildland Fire Management Direction

Executive Order 14308, “Empowering Commonsense Wildfire Prevention and Response,” directs the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to consolidate their wildland fire programs to improve efficiency and effectiveness.

In support of that directive, Secretarial Order 3448, issued January 12, 2026, established the United States Wildland Fire Service (USWFS) within the Office of the Secretary. The USWFS will oversee all aspects of the Department’s wildland fire operations and activities.

The unification and elevation of Wildland Fire Management within the USWFS strengthen the Department’s ability to address escalating fire risks to people, property and infrastructure, while improving mitigation of the hazards faced every day by firefighters.

This historic and necessary change modernizes wildland fire management, supports long-term resilience of public lands and enhances national security and economic competitiveness.

The USWFS will maintain close coordination with leadership and staff across the land management bureaus on all fire-related land management issues. Preparedness and response activities must remain fully aligned with local resource management plans and priorities.

Wildland fire leadership at the national, geographic area and local levels will ensure that personnel, resources and equipment are ready to meet operational needs across all DOI-managed landscapes.

The USWFS will also collaborate seamlessly with Federal, State, Tribal and local government partners to maximize effectiveness and ensure timely wildfire response. Today’s fire environment demands unity among responders and the communities they serve.

Our geographically large nation faces destructive wildfires somewhere every year. This year, much of the western United States is already experiencing extremely dry, very low snow

pack or even snow-free conditions that signal a severe spring and summer. Portions of the South are experiencing similar extremes. Given the breadth and severity of conditions, the USWFS must maintain heightened vigilance when implementing prescribed fire.

**Given the Department of the Interior’s responsibilities to safeguard communities, landscapes, habitat and critical infrastructure, we will enter this season with the presumption of a full suppression strategy applied to every wildfire under DOI management.**

Suppression actions must be prompt, decisive and based on values at risk—balanced with firefighter safety and a clear assessment of probability of success. Until conditions permit, all unplanned ignitions will receive a suppression response, using direct or indirect strategies as conditions dictate.

While indirect approaches may occasionally be warranted, direct suppression should remain the default. DOI firefighters are empowered to assess and mitigate risk while responding to wildfires and have the full support of Department leadership in carrying out this mission.

Prescribed burns play an important role, WHEN CONDITIONS PERMIT.

**When Geographic Areas or the nation reach Preparedness Level 3 or higher, prescribed fire may not be used without express approval from the Geographic Area Fire Chief or their designee. If a Geographic Area escalates into PL3, prescribed fires already underway will be extinguished unless explicit authorization is granted to continue.**

With an understanding that we may be in for a long, hard-fought fire season, rapid response and suppression this spring will help preserve all necessary resources for later in the season.

With the establishment of the USWFS, authority to direct the Department’s wildfire response—coordinated with land managers and intergovernmental partners—has been delegated to fire leadership.

In the face of intense and sometimes unpredictable fire behavior, fire leaders on the ground are relied upon to protect the public, resources, and infrastructure while prioritizing the management of firefighter risk.

Streamlining authority within the fire management organization places decision-making in the hands of highly trained, experienced, collaborative and decisive leaders, ensuring the USWFS can operate with maximum effectiveness and efficiency.

Even with a unified Wildland Fire Service, the Department will continue to rely on contributions from employees across bureaus during peak fire season.

Fire and land management staff are directed to identify and build supplemental fire workforce capacity now, before operational demand intensifies.

Support from non-USWFS employees remains essential to sustaining strong wildfire response and coordination with Federal, Tribal, State and local partners. Every DOI employee can play a meaningful role in supporting wildland fire operations.

**Fire response, however, is only one component of safeguarding the nation from catastrophic wildfires. The USWFS must make full use of available authorities and resources to reduce fuel loads and hazardous vegetation before fires start.**

Unification under the USWFS creates opportunities for greater efficiency in addressing fuels accumulation and focusing efforts on the most hazardous landscapes. A shared risk-based approach will guide vegetation management across Interior-managed lands and strengthen collaboration with Federal, State, Tribal and local partners.

Because wildfire doesn't know or care about who is the landowner or manager, mitigation efforts must be coordinated across jurisdictional boundaries including our bureaus, agencies and with state, local and private landowners.

The USWFS will continue to employ aggressive, practical, science-based vegetation management tools. Achieving meaningful hazardous fuels reduction requires integrated work between fire leaders and land managers. Active land and vegetation management reduces wildfire intensity and impacts. The Department expects efficient use of appropriate tools, including:

1. mowing and grazing;
2. cutting, masticating, thinning, piling, yarding, and selling timber and salvage;
3. establishing and maintaining linear fuel breaks and access roads;
4. biological and chemical fuel treatments;
5. prescribed burning (WHEN CONDITIONS PERMIT);
6. selling vegetation products such as firewood, biomass, timber, and fence posts; and
7. managing invasive species, including the seeding of native, non-invasive, or non-native species.

The coming months will likely present significant challenges.

The Department extends deep appreciation for the dedication, sacrifice and service of all who support this mission. The work of wildland fire personnel is essential to protecting communities, securing infrastructure and sustaining America's lands for future generations. Through the combined efforts of the USWFS, the land management bureaus, and the entire DOI workforce, the nation will be better protected from the ever-increasing risks posed by wildfire.

With gratitude for your service, skills and dedication – be smart, be safe!