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Subject: Chief's Letter of Intent for Wildfire – 2023

To: Regional Foresters, Station Directors, IITF Director, Deputy Chiefs, and WO Directors

Last year was a pivotal time in Forest Service history with the launch of our [10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) and the 90-day pause on prescribed fire and learning review. It also was another challenging year for our wildland firefighters, dispatchers, cache personnel, and employees who support fire response. I recognize that even though we never reached National Preparedness Level 5 in 2022, the fire year still took a mental and physical toll on our employees.

As always, I expect you to focus on our people first. It is our responsibility as leaders to ensure our employees feel physically, psychologically and socially safe. As such, we will remain grounded in risk management principles and committed to our value of safety. We also will continue to support and defend any employee who is doing work in support of our mission. I expect you to address instances of bullying or harassment and reflect these policies and our commitment to safe, harassment free environments in our work and in your delegation letters.

Our sustained commitment to a safe and resilient workforce also means continued emphasis on employee wellbeing. The simple truth is that we cannot carry out our mission if employees are mentally and physically fatigued. I expect you to encourage employees to take advantage of the wide array of services and resources available through the new [Behavioral Health and Employee Wellbeing Program](#). More services will become available in the future through the [Joint Wildland Firefighter Behavioral Health and Wellbeing Program](#) in partnership with the Department of the Interior.

We also need to take advantage of the historic opportunities and investments that will improve our employees' lives. I ask each of you to remain committed to addressing employee housing, modernizing firefighter position descriptions, and using authorities within your control to ensure the health and wellbeing of our workforce. Supporting these efforts will help us recruit and retain the best workforce.

Increased wildfire activity continues to challenge us. We will continue safe and effective initial attack to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources, as reflected in our initial attack success rate of 98% to contain new fire starts within 24 hours. We will also continue to use every tool available to reduce current and future wildfire impacts and create and maintain landscape resilience, including using natural ignitions at the right time and place in collaboration with tribes, communities, and partners. Use of natural ignitions as a management strategy will also be approved by Regional Foresters during Preparedness Levels 4 and 5 in accordance with the Red Book.

The Forest Service's policy is that every fire receives a strategic, risk-based response, commensurate with the threats and opportunities, and uses the full spectrum of management actions. To meet these



expectations, we will need to balance resources available for wildfire response with those needed to make progress on forest treatments to reduce wildfire risk.

We must remain committed to our Wildfire Crisis Strategy, as grounded in the [National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy Addendum Update \(forestsandrangelands.gov\)](#), to do all we can to protect communities, critical infrastructure, and natural resources. We must act with a sense of urgency in the face of this crisis, and use all available emergency authorities and improved business practices to increase the pace and scale of our work to match the scale of the problem. Science-based approaches and tools such as the [“Wildfire Risk to Communities”](#) and [“Risk Management Assistance”](#) dashboards, the [Scenario Investment Planning Platform](#), and [Potential Operational Delineations \(PODs\)](#) will continue to be important for fuels treatment design, wildfire response, and post-fire management strategies.

It is equally critical that we collaborate with partners to achieve mutually beneficial goals across boundaries and in all landscapes. Expanding partnerships to increase capabilities, whether in fire response or other work on the ground, is necessary to meet the current challenges. It is my expectation that all line officers and fire leadership will use pre-season engagement planning with their state, county, and local governments, community leaders, and partners, leveraging the best science available, including the Potential Operational Delineation (PODs) program led by Research and Development. When PODs are in place, agency administrators should ensure that incident management teams use them to inform suppression strategies; when they are not, every effort should be made to develop them real-time as part of strategic operations.

Implementing change, like those brought about by our National Prescribed Fire Program Review and Wildfire Crisis Strategy, can be difficult, but also offers great opportunity. This year, we will continue to prioritize prescribed fire on a larger geographic scale. Our success will be measured not only in accomplishments, but also in how well we set aside our individual unit goals and commit to stewarding the whole with partners by our sides. I expect you to consider delaying or setting aside other mission-related work when necessary to take advantage of favorable conditions for prescribed fire opportunities. The new [National Prescribed Fire Resource Mobilization Strategy](#) identifies ways to prioritize available resources across both suppression and prescribed fire. With limited qualified personnel who can plan and implement prescribed fire, I ask you to provide leader’s intent to all supervisors to allow trained and willing personnel to go on prescribed fire assignments.

As always, we will rely on our core values of safety, interdependence, conservation, diversity and service to help us navigate these changes. As a learning organization, we must continuously adapt to support employees, save lives, protect communities, and care for the land we manage. I understand that changes and cultural shifts are difficult, and our success is not possible without you. With the ongoing wildfire crisis, we need to adapt but remain grounded in our agency’s values, code and commitments. If we focus on taking care of each other, we can overcome our challenges and truly make a difference for the lands we steward and the people we serve.

RANDY MOORE
Chief