



TO: National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG)  
National Multi-Agency Coordinating Group (NMAC)  
National Interagency Coordination Center (NICC)

FROM: Ed Christopher  
Chair, Fire Management Board (FMB)

SUBJECT: **Directive to Standardize Wildland Fire Terminology and Align Systems/Tools**

### **Purpose**

There is a need to update the terminology used to describe wildland fires and the strategies used to manage them. This change reflects current federal policy, which recognizes only two types of wildland fire: prescribed fire and wildfire. It also replaces outdated or confusing terms such as “full suppression,” “less than full suppression,” and “managed fire” with clearer descriptions of how firefighters are working on the ground.

This memorandum directs NWCG, NMAC, and NICC to implement standardized terminology for wildland fire incidents and suppression strategies and to align systems and tools accordingly. The intent is to improve clarity, ensure consistency across agencies, and strengthen public trust in wildfire management reporting and communications.

The updated terminology framework:

- Reinforces that all wildfire responses are active, deliberate efforts to control fires, protect lives, property, and ecosystems, and ensure firefighter safety.
- Removes misleading phrases such as “less than full suppression”
- Reflects operational reality and public expectations
- Allows flexibility as strategies shift with fire behavior and conditions

### Fire Types

- **Prescribed Fire:** A wildland fire originating from a planned ignition in accordance with applicable laws, policies, and regulations to meet specific objectives.
- **Wildfire:** A wildland fire originating from an unplanned ignition, such as lightning, volcanoes, unauthorized and accidental human caused fires, and prescribed fires that are declared wildfires.

### Suppression Strategy Types – Wildfire suppression is the extinguishing or confining of wildfire.

- **Direct Extinguishment Strategy:** Firefighters engage the active flame front directly to stop fire spread.
- **Indirect Confinement Strategy:** Firefighters work away from the active flame front to steer or contain the fire.

## **Next Steps**

NWCG, NMAC and NICC will initiate a terminology and reporting review process to update guidance for incident reporting, public messaging, and training materials in collaboration with:

- Fire leadership across DOI and USDA
- Incident management teams
- Communications and public affairs staff
- Tribal, state, and local partners

## Communication Guidelines

Agencies and incident managers will apply the updated terminology consistently in public updates, briefings, and incident summaries. Messaging will emphasize that all wildfires are actively managed and the application of suppression strategies allows flexible actions as conditions change.

## IMSR Alignment

The Incident Management Situation Report (IMSR) will be adjusted to reflect the updated terminology framework and reviewed against specific criteria for inclusion. This ensures reporting captures the full scope of wildfire activity and supports informed decision-making.

## **Conclusion**

Wildland fire management is complex, but our terminology and reporting shouldn't be. By simplifying how we describe fire types and suppression strategies — and aligning national reporting tools like the IMSR — we can improve understanding, build trust, and support more effective coordination across agencies and with partners and the public.

**Directive:** NWCG, NMAC, and NICC shall begin implementation of this terminology framework immediately by updating systems and reporting tools accordingly. Each group will provide the Fire Management Board with an implementation plan within 30 days of this memo issuance.

## **Distribution:**

Chief, U.S. Wildland Fire Service  
Chief, USFS Fire and Aviation  
FMB  
NASF Fire Director  
NMAC Chair  
NWCG Chair

**Attachment:** White Paper: Updating Wildland Fire Terminology for Clarity and Public Trust