



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

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

SUBJECT: **Federal Wildland Fire Terminology and Systems/Tools Alignment Requirements**

Purpose

This memorandum supersedes FMB Memorandum No. 26-001 and clarifies terminology adoption for wildfires under federal jurisdiction and identifies required changes in systems utilized for federal-jurisdiction wildfire reporting.

There is a need to update the terminology used to describe federal response to wildfires 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. Outdated or confusing terms such as “less than full suppression,” and “managed fire” will no longer be used in describing federal-jurisdiction suppression strategies. 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

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

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

Communication Guidelines

Federal agencies and personnel managing wildfires on federal jurisdiction 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 for federal incidents 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 for federal incidents should be clear. By simplifying how we describe fire types and suppression strategies, and aligning national reporting tools like the Incident Management Situation Report, we can improve understanding, build trust, and support more effective coordination across agencies, with partners, and the public.

To accomplish this federal requirement, NWCG, NMAC, and NICC are requested to support implementation of this terminology framework by updating systems and reporting tools accordingly. Consistent with FMB Memorandum No. 26-001, FMB requests prompt action to support the needs of federal partner agencies and provide an implementation plan within 30 days of this issuance.

The NWCG Glossary of Wildland Fire Terminology will be maintained as the source of record. When consensus cannot be achieved between federal and non-federal NWCG members, federal policy definitions will be so noted.

Distribution:

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