
INSTRUCTOR:

LESSON: Wildland Fire Decision Support System – Incident Commander

COURSE: S-200 – Initial Attack Incident Commander

Emphasis: introduce concepts of WFDSS decision support.

OBJECTIVES:

Upon completion of this lesson, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS).
2. Identify circumstances that might warrant a WFDSS decision be published.

I. INTRODUCTION

WFDSS is designed to establish a process for documenting decisions on all types of wildland fires. The WFDSS process is scalable to changing fire complexity. WFDSS provides a platform for risk-informed decision-making.

Documentation and analysis of wildland fire management decisions have been required by federal agency policy for nearly 30 years. The 2009 Policy Implementation Guidance requires-

“Managers will use a decision support process to guide and document wildfire decisions. The process will provide situational assessment, analyze hazards and risk, define implementation actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.”

The Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS) was developed to meet this need. The Forest Service (FS), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) enter all fires into WFDSS, regardless of size. National Park Service (NPS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) enter fires into WFDSS only when it escapes initial attack. At 98% initial attack success, there may not be a lot of need for analysis to inform decisions. However as incidents escape initial attack or are managed for multiple objectives more analysis is needed to inform the decision.

II. WHEN A WFDSS DECISION IS NEEDED

It is recommended that a decision be considered if;

- Wildland fires are no longer within the initial action defined by the Fire Management Plan (preplanned response is not effective).
- Fire continues to actively spread beyond one or more burning periods.
- Wildland fires are being managed or considered for multiple objectives.
- Prescribed fires exceed prescriptions and are declared wildfires

In some cases a WFDSS decision may not be required such as initial attack on a small fire, at other times the WFDSS decision may be ongoing while an emerging fire is being engaged. If a WFDSS decision has not yet been published, it is important to follow the established management strategy (put the fire out, monitor the fire, or manage the fire for multiple objectives, etc.). Once available the WFDSS decision is the guiding document with which the incident is managed. Decision-making associated with managing wildland fire can have critical impacts. Publishing a decision provides documentation of the management action taken on the fire and the rationale behind it.

III. WHAT IS WFDSS?

WFDSS is designed to be consistent with accepted models of risk-informed decision making. WFDSS is a web based system that allows users to acquire information, analyze that information, apply that information to inform their decision and gain situational awareness, then to archive the decision and the documentation. To accomplish this, WFDSS maximizes the use of appropriately-based deliberation as well as analysis. It is an iterative, information-goal directed process.

Risk-informed decision making - requires two distinct but linked processes:

1. Analysis:

- Rigorous, replicable methods to provide information about factual questions.
- Brings new information into the process – **informs deliberation.**

2. Deliberation:

- Discussion, reflection, and persuasion to communicate, raise, and collectively consider issues, increase understanding, and facilitate substantive decisions.
- Brings new insights, questions, and problem formulations – **frames analysis.**

WFDSS is designed to include models and tools to analyze and assess the incident. The outputs can then be used to support the decision and assist in driving strategies and future tactics.

Decision making and publishing a WFDSS decision is the responsibility of the appropriate Line Officer or Unit Manager (District Ranger, Forest Supervisor, Regional Forester, Park or Refuge Superintendent, etc.) Fire managers and fire personnel as well as resource managers provide critical input to the development of the decision.

IV. YOUR ROLE IN WFDSS

As an Initial Attack IC you may be asked to provide input to a decision based on your on-the-ground knowledge of the fire. Knowledge and understanding of the risk-informed decision-making process will be critical. Continual growth and learning throughout your career to stay abreast of how tools have changed, how they are interfacing with WFDSS, and how your input might be incorporated in decision documents will be a necessity.

As an Initial Attack IC you may become involved in transitioning up to a higher level incident management organization and dealing with what may become longer duration events where risks, values, costs, and probability of success all must be weighed in developing management strategies. Without your understanding of these processes and involvement in the strategic planning process relevant data may be missed.

It is important to note that in some cases WFDSS decisions may be ongoing while you are making tactical decisions on a fire. If a WFDSS decision has not yet been published it is important to understand the management strategy. Once available it is essential that you understand the decision and operate within its guidelines as it truly represents the leader's intent and should be the reference with which you manage the incident.

Training aids are available on the WFDSS site on the Training tab http://wfdss.usgs.gov/wfdss/WFDSS_Training.shtml To help users become familiar with navigating in the program WFDSS 101 series is an excellent source for learning how to use WFDSS.

V. SUMMARY

Management of wildland fire represents one of the most complex and highest risk activities in land management. Decision support and its contributions to decision-making are vital to fire management success. Decision support tools range from subjective information to quantitative long-term analysis processes and provide information to decision-makers. These tools and processes incorporate science and technology to assist in decision making based on the best available information.

Decision support gives managers the ability to reduce the amount of uncertainty surrounding the fire, understand the amount of difficulty that could be encountered during management and possible outcomes, develop management strategies and operational tactics and provide a common understanding and clearer explanation of the situation.

Your input to the decision analysis can be key in the success of managing an incident and providing for firefighter safety.