



DUSTIN T. MILLER, DIRECTOR
EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

300 N. 6th Street Suite 103
PO Box 83720
Boise, ID 83720-0050
Phone (208) 334-0200
Fax (208) 334-5342

To: IDL Firefighters, Staff, and Agency Cooperators
From: Dustin Miller, Director
Date: May 2, 2023
Subject: Leader's Intent – 2023 Fire Season

With the 2023 fire season right around the corner, we must be ever mindful about everyone's safety. The safety of our firefighters, all support personnel, and the public is paramount, and it will always be.

While Idaho's citizens and leaders expect the Idaho Department of Lands to suppress fires quickly with an eye for limiting costs, safety cannot and will not be compromised. It is imperative that you rely on your training, experience, and best judgement to ensure everyone's safety this fire season while conducting aggressive initial attack. Additionally, crews must conduct themselves in a professional manner on and off the fireline as the IDL fire program is held in high regard and will remain so.

Although mother nature has provided impressive snowpacks well above normal in most basins across the state and the west, it is imperative that we plan and prepare for a busy fire season. Do not let your guard down. This season we will continue with our goal of keeping 94% of the fires that occur on land we protect at 10 acres or less. Last season we nearly achieved this important suppression goal by ending the season at 92%.

We have been experiencing the new norm of longer fire seasons and more extreme fire behavior coupled with unprecedented demand for personnel and resources. Ongoing drought conditions, uncharacteristically high fuel loading, a growing population recreating on Idaho's rangelands and forests, and more development occurring in the Wildland Urban Interface all pose significant challenges.

Idaho's policy makers are acutely aware of the changing landscape and challenging environment for mustering resources. They are well informed of the destruction caused by catastrophic fires across the west. They understand how the unnatural accumulation of fuels on the landscape and the persistent drought contribute to those catastrophic fires. And they know we must build and maintain a strong firefighting force to protect Idaho's citizens and natural resources. Governor Little is known for saying, "What you do to plan for the bad years during the good years, is what matters most." His wise advice guides how we are adapting and modernizing IDL fire.

After the historic 2015 fire season, IDL charted a course designed to ensure we could meet our commitments to Idaho's forest industry and citizens - maintaining a high success rate on initial attack and keeping fires small. We have an obligation to do this, as protecting the natural resources and communities of a changing Idaho is paramount to the IDL mission.

We assessed our needs and reviewed the fire program to begin the process of evolving into a modern firefighting force. We also laid plans to acquire the resources needed to incrementally build capacity. Since then, we have worked diligently to implement that plan.

Our persistent work along with support of the Governor, Land Board and Idaho Legislature has resulted in increased wages for firefighters, hazard pay, paid R&R, new permanent fire line leadership positions, rebooting and staffing the Cottonwood Forest Protective District in eastern Idaho, and funding for new equipment for this district and elsewhere.

Idaho works cooperatively with our federal agency partners to suppress wildfires under a Master Fire Agreement which is renegotiated every five years. This agreement, which was recently renegotiated and is now in effect, has also helped shape our modernization efforts.

While offset protection remains in place throughout much of the state, the agreement now better aligns with agency missions, expands the use of mutual aid, and increases billing thresholds. The new agreement is intended to improve efficiency from a fire business perspective. Regardless of jurisdiction and responsibility, the commitment to a closest forces response remains unchanged under the new agreement.


I can say with confidence we have made great strides in the march toward modernization, but more work is needed. More investment in suppression capacity, fuels treatments and prevention is crucial as we continue dealing with the growing threat of catastrophic fire.

At the federal level, the U.S. Forest Service recently launched a wildfire crisis strategy. They seek to utilize all available resources and authorities and work with partners on strategic forest health treatments by prioritizing fire sheds across the west. Their initial investment of nearly \$1 billion will dramatically increase the pace and scale of forest health treatments across the west over the next 10 years. Addressing risks on National Forest lands at this larger scale complements Idaho's work under the Good Neighbor Authority and Shared Stewardship Initiative.

Tackling the fire crisis in Idaho and the west collaboratively with our partners is the only path to success. No one agency can do it alone. And like Teddy Roosevelt said, "nothing worth gaining is ever gained without effort."

I am sincerely proud of the men and women that make up this fire program, and I cannot say enough about how much I appreciate your passion and dedication. Like I said earlier, your safety and the safety of all fire personnel and the public is the number one priority. As IDL wildland firefighters, we will always fight fire aggressively after accounting for safety first, and I ask that line officers articulate this leader's intent on fire incidents this summer.

Be safe, be aware and please take care of each other this season.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dustin T. Mikh". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.