

The following is excerpted from a couple messages recently received from Jerry T. Williams, Director, Fire and Aviation Management, USDA Forest Service. They are important. They are poignant. Please share far and wide...

"We are seeing a rapid escalation in fire danger indices across much of the West. Of most concern is the number of large wildfires we're experiencing at high elevations, high latitudes, and in 'cooler/wetter' habitat types. We would not expect to see this kind of fire activity in these fire regimes this early in the year. Already we have experienced large, difficult to control wildfires on the Oregon coast, the west side of the Cascades, the Pasayten Wilderness, and in NW Montana.

"...take the time, now, to ensure that our people are maintaining a high degree of situational awareness and that we are maintaining highest possible initial attack capabilities. Under these burning conditions, the safest, least costly wildfire is detected early, attacked aggressively, and suppressed quickly. Remain mindful that - again under these circumstances - any wildfire that we are slow to engage or that we back away from will almost certainly require us to deal with later; likely at much larger size, with a smaller suppression force, and with few good options.

"Incident Commanders on all wildfires (must) establish a control objective (spatial and/or temporal), (made known to the crew, the dispatchers, and the fire duty officer), that serves as a "line in the sand" to provide them the indicator that their strategies and tactics are either working (they achieve the objective) or failing (their objective is being exceeded). When the objective is exceeded it, most importantly, serves as the trigger to indicate that the IC needs to re-assess the situation, re-assess strategies and tactics, and re-affirm command qualifications for the situation at hand. Over 70% of all fireline related fatalities occur on extended attack operations as wildfires transition from something benign to something dangerous. We often see that IC's get "caught" initial attacking a significantly larger, more complex wildfire than they are organized, staffed, or qualified to deal with."

"Let's stay close to the basics now. Up-to-date information, good exchange of information, adherence to established safe practices, and proactive, thinking-ahead management based on anticipated load will go a long way in coming through what, by all measures, is shaping up as another very difficult, very dangerous fire season.

(Emphases Added)