

PUTTING THE PULASKI CONFERENCE IN PERSPECTIVE



Jack Kirkendall

The first Pulaski Conference's *Fire Suppression: Foundational Doctrine* represents contributions from a wide array of fire management and agency administrator experience and leadership levels.

At this unique conference, rank was not a factor in:

- Driving the process of analyzing our current approach to fireline decisionmaking,
- Examining our current rule set for implementing and monitoring decisions and actions on the fire-ground, or
- The development of the foundational doctrine.

All who participated in the Pulaski Conference expressed a strong desire to ensure that the final product touched all levels of our agency.

Recognized Need

The need for this effort and resulting foundational doctrine could not be more timely. As far back as the first Human Factors Workshop in 1995 and the 1998 *TriData-Phase III Wildland Firefighter Awareness Study*, there has been a recognized need to reshape our approach to fireline actions and firefighter safety in a way that takes into account and recognizes:

Jack Kirkendall is the fire management officer for the USDA Forest Service, Bitterroot National Forest, Hamilton, MT. He participated in the Pulaski Conference.

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- Decisionmaking and thinking processes, and
- The appropriate levels of leadership and responsibility for all actions—or lack of action—up and down the line.

More recently, the aftermath of the Cramer incident, actions by Congress, and the still ongoing motions surrounding the

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Thirtymile Fire have all heightened everyone's concern over what is appropriate and what isn't.

Beyond Rule Set

What is doctrine and how does it differ from our current rule set?

Doctrine is the expression of the fundamental framework, concepts, and principles that guide the planning and conduct of operations. It is authoritative, but flexible. Doctrine is definitive in order to guide specific operations, yet adaptable enough to address diverse and varied situations—like the fire environment.

Rules dictate specific courses of action regardless of conditions or the situation. Rules are less adaptable as future changes in mission and the fire environment occur. They are specific must do's and can't do's. Sound familiar?

Fundamental Decision Framework

The doctrine that was created at the Pulaski Conference expresses a high degree of reliance on the individual and on the resilience of the organization that supports the individual. This doctrine is based on common principles. It is designed to provide a fundamental decision framework and action-oriented concepts that will guide our activities into the future. One needs to read the Pulaski Conference doctrine with this in mind.

It was recognized by all who participated in this conference that to allow our efforts and product to languish would be a fatal flaw in the process of changing the way we think and do business. There is still much work that needs to be done, including coordination with our partners in the wildland fire community and the development of more specific operational doctrine. ■

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Two weeks after the first Pulaski Conference, its proposed *Fire Suppression: Foundational Doctrine* publication was presented to the USDA Forest Service's National Leadership Team. The team's members immediately understood and embraced the premise.

"Most importantly," says Ed Hollenshead, Pulaski Conference incident commander and national fire operations safety officer for the USDA Forest Service at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, ID, "this significant conceptual foundation has been launched for consideration—and adoption. This, alone, represents one huge

step into the possible future of our wildland fire suppression program."

At present, no one can know what the future holds. Hollenshead informs us that perhaps Steve Holdsambeck, fire operations safety officer for the USDA Forest Service's Intermountain Region, Ogden, UT, best sums up the current situation:

"There are those among us who say the change to principle-driven fire suppression is too great, the pace too quick. Whether caution or timidity drives them, they must be assured our fight is for the future. The environment in which we do this job is fundamentally different

than ever before. It continues to change at an unprecedented pace. Our future is stormy; our case is new. We must discard the old paradigms and move ahead." ■

Important Updates

In January 2006, two important Pulaski Conference updates occurred. The foundational doctrine that evolved from the first Pulaski Conference was adopted by the Chief of the Forest Service (see story on following page). Rotor and Wing, the second Pulaski Conference that focused on forming aviation doctrine, was held in Skamania, WA (see story on page 16).



Change agents. The Pulaski Conference participants launched a significant conceptual foundation that represents a potential huge step into the future of wildland fire suppression. Photo: Gary C. Chancey, USDA Forest Service, Black Hills National Forest, Custer, SD, 2005.