



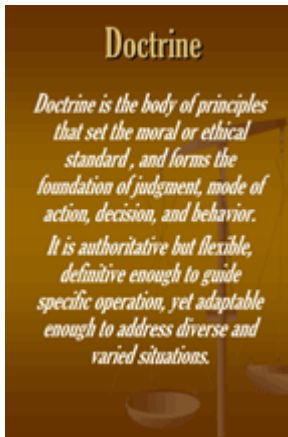
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Principles Driven Fire Suppression – The Pulaski Conference



During the first week of June, a group of line officers, fire managers and practitioners, safety and occupational health professionals, researchers, and representatives of seven other federal, state, and local fire agencies from across the country convened in Alta, Utah to take a clean slate and draft the “doctrine” – the body of principles – that would guide our agency’s fire suppression activities and actions into the future.

It was time for the Forest Service to rethink our approach to fire suppression. Over the past several years we have seen a tremendous increase in both the complexity of the wildland fire suppression environment and the expectations placed upon our firefighters. At the same time the layering of rules and processes resulting from tragedy fires have not ensured, and in many cases have actually worked to confuse the situational awareness necessary to safely accomplish our fire suppression objectives.



Pulaski Conference participants drafted, and delivered to Tom Harbour, Director of F&AM, principles focused on defining the fire suppression mission, on displaying the realities of the wildfire environment, and on clarifying the roles of agency administrators, fireline leaders, and firefighters. They identified principles that would guide operational performance, define leadership and accountability, and explain the role of cost management, and risk and risk management. In combination, these principles form the doctrine for fire suppression. Some aspects of the doctrine represent a significant departure from our current point of reference, and answer some of the most salient issues before us today.

The doctrine:

- Declares fire management (and therefore fire suppression) is critical to accomplish our agency mission, and avers that all agency employees have some role in supporting fire suppression in accordance to their skills and capabilities
- Accepts responsibility to support other national emergencies, and empowers employees to respond to local



emergencies when they can do so safely

- Acknowledges fire suppression as inherently dangerous work, where fire fighters working within agency policy and rules, and applying the best available science, equipment, and training can still be seriously injured or killed
- Adopts a risk management approach to minimize the exposure and affects of the inherent hazards
- Embraces principles critical to the success of a risk management approach, including:
 - Less reliance on rules and processes and greater reliance on judgment in decision-making
 - Demonstrated fitness for command in fire leadership positions
 - Accountability based on the quality of behaviors and decisions with respect to known expectations – not just outcomes
 - Reaffirmation of the need for decisive and effective fire suppression actions
 - The decentralization of command and control on the fireline

This brief summary doesn't do justice to the doctrine drafted at the Pulaski Conference. To see the entire work, visit the website at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/news/vnr/releases/doctrinefinala.pdf>

The Forest Service National Leadership Team is currently in the process of formalizing their acceptance of this foundational doctrine for fire suppression. In doing so, they recognize that much of the doctrine is service wide in scope. Some of it spans the gamut of Fire and Aviation Management. To their credit they understand and embrace the prospect that the work started at a small lodge in the mountains of Utah will have profound and lasting affect on the entire agency.

**** Special thanks to Harv Forsgren for contributing to this issue of the Safety Zone. ****

"These are times in which genius would wish to live. It is not in the still calm of life or the repose of a pacific station that great characters are formed. The habits of a vigorous mind are formed in contending with difficulties. Great necessities call out great virtues. When a mind is raised and animated by scenes that engage the heart, then those qualities which would otherwise lay dormant wake into life and form the character of the hero and the statesman."

Abigail Adams in a letter to her son, John Quincy Adams, 1779.

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"Newsletter of the Forest Service Fire Operations Safety Council"

<http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/safety/council/>

