



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

JAN 11 1999

Honorable Carol M. Browner
Administrator, United States Environmental
Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Ms. Browner:

Thank you for including the Department of the Interior on the multi-agency steering group that advised the Environmental Protection Agency regarding air quality policy on wildland and prescribed fires. The DOI and its affected land managing bureaus are pleased to accept and endorse the policies and guidance in the "Interim Air Quality Policy on Wildland and Prescribed Fires." This policy document will help expedite coordination and cooperation among land managers and air regulators, so that we may meet the policy's dual goals of: (1) allowing fire to function in its natural role in the wildlands, and (2) protecting public health and welfare. These goals are consistent with those resulting from the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and Program Review in which EPA participated and, as such, should be achieved in a cooperative and proactive manner by all those subject to the policy's guidance.

As specified in EPA's policy, the public health and welfare air quality concerns raised by the effects of fires managed for resource benefits can be mitigated by requiring such fires to be managed within comprehensive smoke management programs. Smoke management programs also mitigate nuisance and public safety hazards posed by smoke intrusions into populated areas. The EPA's policy sets forth the components of a basic, but comprehensive, smoke management program to be developed and implemented by State and tribal regulatory agencies, subject to EPA oversight. It also provides an incentive for States and tribes to implement smoke management programs early, in order to ensure better management of smoke from potential increased levels of wildland burning. Where wildland fire use is essential to achieving land-based resource benefits, such use within DOI bureaus will be predicated on compliance with the national ambient air quality standards and will be consistent with the national visibility goal for Class I areas within the framework of EPA's policy, among other important considerations.

Protection of air quality and other environmental concerns is especially important for units of the national parks and wilderness systems under DOI jurisdiction. The U.S. Congress has mandated, through provisions in the Clean Air Act, special protection of Class I parks and wilderness areas throughout the Nation, and we intend to assure our own land management activities contribute to achieving that protection through careful planning and responsible implementation. To date, the Department has directed its affected bureaus to

Honorable Carol M. Browner

2

develop an interagency fire-air quality action plan for implementation on a national scale to assure inclusion of air quality goals in carrying out future fire management activities. Let me assure you the prescriptions for all fires managed for resource benefits by the DOI's land managing bureaus will include smoke management components to minimize air pollutant emissions and mitigate potential air quality impacts.

The Department of the Interior looks forward to helping you implement this policy and having our staffs continue to work together to achieve our common goals. As we proceed with implementation, we also encourage EPA's oversight and support in facilitating cooperation from State and local regulators to assure achievement of the policy's two primary goals in a balanced manner.

Sincerely,



bcc:

PMB: Asst. Secretary, J.Douglas

FWP: Asst. Secretary, Deputy Asst. Secretary, M.Ross

LMM: Acting Asst. Secretary

NPS: Director

WASO-ARD: C.Shaver, B.Mitchell, J.Bunyak, H.Sharpless

WASO-Fire: R.Gale, T.Zimmerman

FWS: Director

AQB: S.Silva

Fire: R.Erb

BLM: Director

Air: S.Archer

Fire: R.Dunton

BLA: Director

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