

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Office of Fire and Aviation
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March 19, 2004

In Reply Refer To:

1790 (WO210/FA620/WO270) P

Instruction Memorandum No. OF&A 2004-014

Expires: 9/30/2005

To: WO Officials, State Directors, Center Directors, and Field Managers
Attention: Planning and Environmental Coordinators, Fire Management
Officers, Foresters, Natural Resource Specialists

From: Director, Office of Fire and Aviation
Assistant Director, Renewable Resources and Planning

Subject: Healthy Forest Initiative and Healthy Forest Restoration Act National
Environmental Policy Act Documentation Guidance

Purpose: The purpose of this instruction memorandum is to provide additional guidance for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for hazardous fuels reduction and post-fire rehabilitation projects under the Healthy Forest Initiative and Healthy Forest Restoration Act and to identify associated reporting requirements.

Background: As part of the Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI), the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) issued guidance on December 9, 2002, to the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture describing the core elements of an Environmental Assessment (EA) (http://web.blm.gov/internal/fire/ea/guidance/g_CEQmemo.pdf). During Fiscal Year 2003, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) completed 7 pilot EAs using this streamlined guidance. These pilot EAs and their associated Finding of No Significant Impact and Decision Record may be viewed at:
"http://web.blm.gov/internal/fire/ea/index.htm"

On June 5, 2003, the Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture Forest Service published final implementing procedures in the Federal Register to give notice that each agency's directives would be revised to contain the final categorical exclusions as identified in the Federal Register (68 FR 33813-33824).

Use of the two new categorical exclusions (1.12 and 1.13) was outlined in [the](#) BLM Washington Office Instruction Memorandums No. 2003-221, No. 2003-221, Change 1 and No. 2004-065.

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On December 3, 2003, the President signed into law the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA) (P.L. 108-148). This law provides new requirements for completing EAs and Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) for hazardous fuels reduction projects authorized under this authority. The Bureau is currently working with the Department of Agriculture Forest Service to prepare a HFRA Field Guide to provide guidance for use of this new authority. The Field Guide is expected to be released early March 2004, and will be discussed during a satellite training session on March 11th. Upon release of the HFRA Field Guide, additional guidance will be issued regarding the tracking and reporting of all projects using this authority.

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Policy/Action: Managers will ensure full use of the streamlining tools provided under the HFI and HFRA. The following actions will be implemented.

1. Each office will enter into the National Fire Plan Operations and Reporting System (NFPORS) the start date and the completion date of each NEPA document for each hazardous fuels or post-fire rehabilitation project. Only one NEPA activity may be entered per project.
2. The NFPORS NEPA Activities data element list will be updated within the next few months to track use of HFI and HFRA tools. Additional guidance will be provided at that time for ensuring proper recording of environmental documents under either the HFI or HFRA authorities.
3. When an EA is the correct NEPA document for analyzing the impacts of a proposed hazardous fuels project or post-fire rehabilitation project, offices will use the streamlined HFI EA guidance from CEQ to complete the EA. This includes EAs completed under the HFRA authority.
4. Offices will review all fuels reduction projects currently identified in NFPORS as NEPA EA Activities to consider whether or not these projects are authorized under the Categorical Exclusion 1.12 or under HFRA. If the CX will apply it should be used.
5. Finally, all offices will track the estimated time and dollar savings of completing the NEPA documentation for hazardous fuels reduction and post-fire rehabilitation projects using the HFI guidance or using the HFRA authority. The cost efficiency estimate for both time and funding spent for completion of the NEPA document using HFI and/or HFRA will be tracked separately and will be based on the best professional judgment of the Field Office Manager. This information will be provided upon request by the Washington Office.

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Time frame: Effective upon signature.

Manual/Handbook Sections Affected: This information supplements Chapter IV EA guidance in the Bureau of Land Management NEPA Handbook (H-1790-1).

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Coordination: FA-620, WO-210 and WO-270 cooperatively developed this memorandum.

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Contact: For more information please contact, Ted Milesnick, Chief Fire Planning and Research, 208-387-5198; or Carol MacDonald, Planning and Environmental Analyst, 202-452-5111 or Laura Ceperly, Forests and Woodlands Group Manager.

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Melanie Miller, Fire Ecologist (MTDC)

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