

# MANAGING WILDFIRES IN THE MOJAVE DESERT PRIORITIES AND GUIDANCE FOR INCIDENT COMMANDERS SPRING 2009

During periods of high fuel loads and hot, dry, windy weather conditions, wildfires in the Mojave Desert have the potential to exhibit extreme fire behavior and grow large quickly. The Mojave Desert is not a fire-adapted ecosystem, but exotic vegetation can fuel fires that can drastically alter the landscape. Firefighters are encouraged to safely and aggressively suppress wildfires to reduce total acres burned, while minimizing impacts from their suppression actions. Agency administrators must provide guidance to incident commanders on resource values, goals, and constraints through preseason planning.

## MOJAVE DESERT PRIORITIES

1. ENSURE SAFETY OF FIREFIGHTERS AND THE PUBLIC
2. MINIMIZE ACRES BURNED (HABITAT LOSS) THROUGH RAPID FIRE SUPPRESSION
3. MINIMIZE SUPPRESSION DAMAGE TO RESOURCES

## DECISION MAKING

Protecting life and property is paramount in every decision and action. Consider the current and predicted weather, fire behavior, fuel loading, available suppression tools, and resources that are threatened by the fire, and implement appropriate firefighting methods that will minimize resource damage. Rapid and aggressive response may be warranted and can minimize acres burned. Resource damage occurs from both fire and some suppression actions, but burned desert is damaged desert. Use Best Management Practices to minimize resource damage.

Incident commanders should not wait for Resource Advisors before implementing all safe and aggressive suppression tactics necessary during Initial Attack:

- **Consider immediately the use of air attack resources to limit fire spread.** Avoid spreading non-native organisms by following the *Operational Guidelines for Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention and Equipment Cleaning*.
- **Using backfires/burnouts, off- road driving or heavy equipment** to construct fireline may have substantial impacts, but may be justified in order to minimize acres burned. Use tactics appropriate for the area designation and administering agency. **\*\*For NPS lands the Resource Advisor must be consulted before use of heavy equipment or off-road driving. In designated wilderness, all motorized equipment usage must be approved by the appropriate agency administrator\*\*.**
- **Stop all habitat damaging tactics when they are no longer required** to prevent a larger or more severe fire. Constantly assess the fire situation and Mojave Desert priorities as they relate to your operations. Document actions to facilitate post-fire rehabilitation of suppression actions.
- **Upon communication with the Resource Advisor**, incorporate his/her knowledge and advice into the Incident Operations in a safe and efficient manner.

STAY CALM, BE ALERT, THINK CLEARLY, ACT DECISIVELY