



Idaho Department of Lands  
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Equal Opportunity Employer

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## MEMORANDUM

**To:** IDL Leadership, Firefighters, and Support Staff  
**From:** Dustin Miller, Director  
**Date:** May 21, 2026  
**Subject:** Leader's Intent – 2026 Fire Season

As we prepare for the 2026 fire season, all indicators point toward another challenging year across Idaho and the western United States. Below-average snowpack, persistent drought, and unseasonably warm temperatures are creating conditions conducive to increased wildfire activity. These conditions will likely intensify competition for firefighting resources and affect resource availability during peak demand periods.

The trend toward longer and more severe fire seasons continues to shape our operating environment. Within Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) protection areas, the fire season is now more than 32 days longer than it was only a few years ago. This "new normal" of extended seasons, extreme fire behavior, and increased demand for resources requires resilience, adaptability, and professionalism from all of us. Long-term drought, increased fuel loading, expansion of the wildland-urban interface (WUI), and growing recreational use across private, endowment, and public lands continue to add complexity to our mission.

Despite these challenges, firefighter and public safety remain our highest priority. Every operational decision must be grounded in sound risk management principles, with life safety as the first consideration in all actions. Wildland firefighting is inherently dangerous work, and no amount of preparation or training can eliminate every risk. Over the past two years, our fire community experienced heartbreaking losses, including pilot Julianna Turchetti in 2024 and firefighter Isabella Oscarson in 2025. Their absence continues to be felt across our profession. We honor their memory by looking out for one another, taking care of our crews, and never losing sight of the responsibility we carry each day.

IDL remains committed to aggressive initial attack and the application of full suppression tactics whenever conditions allow and risks can be appropriately managed. Rapid, decisive action remains critical to limiting fire growth and reducing impacts to communities, firefighters, and natural resources. We will continue striving to keep 95 percent of wildfires at 10 acres or less, recognizing that early containment remains the most effective way to reduce overall risk. Protecting communities, timber resources, critical infrastructure, and the WUI will continue guiding suppression

strategies, operational decision-making, and resource allocation throughout the season.

Despite ongoing fiscal challenges, we are entering the 2026 season in a strong operational posture. We have increased the number of firefighters available this year and achieved full staffing across all fire management operational positions with zero vacancies. There will be no reduction in service to the citizens we serve or to our interagency partners. We also remain actively engaged in federal unification and reorganization efforts while continuing to support national direction and interagency coordination initiatives.

Key priorities and ongoing efforts for 2026 include:

- Implementing the new Shared Stewardship Agreement to advance cross-boundary fuels management.
- Advancing long-term wildfire resilience and strategic planning efforts.
- Continuing implementation of the Governor's Wildfire Report initiatives.
- Strengthening coordination through the IFCA/IDL/IOEM Memorandum of Understanding.
- Modernizing the aviation program to improve initial attack effectiveness and operational capability.
- Continuing emphasis on wildfire prevention, fuels management, and community risk reduction.

Given the anticipated complexity of the 2026 fire season, strong partnerships and unified efforts will be essential. We remain committed to close coordination, resource sharing, and consistent communication with our federal, state, local, and Tribal partners to ensure an effective and cohesive response.

I want to personally thank our firefighters, support staff, dispatchers, aviation personnel, and leaders across this agency for the work you do every day. Your professionalism, dedication, and service to the people of Idaho are what make this program respected and successful. The long hours, time away from family, physical demands, and sacrifices required of this profession do not go unnoticed. Idaho is safer because of your commitment and willingness to serve.

As we enter the 2026 fire season, please keep the following expectations in mind:

- Prioritize firefighter and public safety in every decision and operation.
- Apply sound risk management principles and maintain situational awareness.
- Communicate clear leader's intent on every incident.
- Coordinate closely with interagency and Tribal partners.
- Utilize aggressive initial attack and full suppression tactics only after safety considerations have been fully evaluated.
- Order and use resources responsibly and cost-effectively.
- Remain vigilant regarding fatigue, stress, and firefighter well-being.
- Conduct yourselves professionally and uphold the values of this organization at all times.

Thank you again for your dedication, sacrifice, and commitment to the people of Idaho. Please continue to watch over yourselves and each other throughout this season.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Dustin T. Miller". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.