



United States Department of Agriculture

Office of the Secretary
Washington, D.C. 20250

FEB 12 2015

Mr. Casey Judd, President
Federal Wildland Fire Service Association
Post Office Box 617
Inkom, Idaho 83245

Dear Mr. Judd:

Thank you for your letter of October 6, 2014, regarding your concerns about the USDA Forest Service's application of Departmental Regulation 5400-005, Use of Government Vehicle for Home Work. I apologize for the delayed response.

In your letter you suggest that this Departmental Regulation (DR), as applied by the Forest Service, may delay wildland firefighting personnel from responding to emergencies, thereby leading to injury or loss of life. I can assure you this is not the case. The Forest Service strives to evaluate and minimize risks with a broad perspective in consideration of both the people we serve and the landscapes we protect.

The DR you reference does actually allow wildland firefighters to take government vehicles home in appropriate circumstances. According to DR 5400-005, Appendix B, short-term home-to-work vehicle use for employees involved in responding to natural disasters may be allowed in situations where advanced approval by the Secretary is not possible. Section 6(b) further explains that the initial approval for contingency determinations may not exceed 15 days, and may then be extended for additional 90-day periods. Employees who are activated for fire responses are covered under this "contingency determination." This is not strictly a USDA policy, but applies across the Federal Government.

We have reviewed the governing regulation, Federal Management Regulations (FMR) sections 102-5.50 through 5.65. Based on this review of the FMR, units can request advance approval for specific employees in the 301 series who might be activated for a fire response. The request on the form AD-728 should include the name, title, job series, duty station (i.e. National Forest name, city, state), and basis for the determination (i.e. a duty officer as explained in your email). Once this form is submitted, USDA is authorized to issue prior approval for the named individuals to drive government vehicles to their places of residence. This initial approval remains in effect for 15 days. If the fire response exceeds 15 days, units may request a 90-day extension.

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Thank for your continued interest in the welfare of our wildland firefighters. I assure you that I share your concerns, and the safety of firefighters and the resources they protect are the Forest Service's highest priorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Robert Bonnie", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Robert Bonnie
Under Secretary
Natural Resources and Environment