Climate and Fire Behavior Fuel Models

Dry Climate and Humid Climate Labels

LANDFIRE often receives inquiries about why Fire Behavior Fuel Models (FBFMs) labeled as 'dry climate' are present in humid climates, and vice versa. '**Humid climate'** and '**dry climate'** labels are solely intended to indicate the fuel's **moisture of extinction** and are not meant to restrict the models to being utilized *only* in a dry or humid climates.

- **Dry climate models** have a **lower** moisture of extinction (often around 15%).

- **Humid climate models** have a **higher** moisture of extinction.

What truly matters is whether the predicted fire behavior (such as Rate of Spread (ROS) and flame length) is represented properly. Feedback from fuel expert workshops across the United States shows that in a humid climate, a model labeled as 'dry climate' may, at times, describe the actual fire behavior more accurately than the 'humid climate' models. The main issue that should always be observed is fire carry in fuels when the extinction moisture is higher than the number associated with the dry climate models.

FBFMs are Physics-Based, Not Ecosystem-Based

It is possible for a fire modeler to rely too much on FBFM guide labels, descriptions, and photos because of the assumption that the guide is an **ecotype description**.

- **Ecotype descriptions** (like those in classification systems such as NatureServe) are intended to represent the actual vegetation types and composition of a landscape.

- **Fire Behavior Fuel Models** are **only** intended to predict fire behavior based on the composition and conditions shown in the Standard Fire Behavior Fuel Models: A Comprehensive Set for Use with Rothermel's Surface Fire Spread Model guide (e.g., Table 7, below).

When the fuel model descriptions were created, the authors attempted to provide a bridge for users with an ecology background by specifying elements like dry/humid climate. However, it is more accurate to view FBFMs as they are laid out in the guide: a set of physical parameters.

Table 7—Fuel model parameters.

Fuel model code	Fuel load (t/ac) 1-hr	10-hr	100-hr	Live herb	Live woody	Fuel model type[a]	SAV ratio (1/ft)[b] Dead 1-hr	Live herb	Live woody	Fuel bed depth (ft)	Dead fuel extinction moisture (percent)	Heat content BTU/lb[c]
GR1	0.10	0.00	0.00	0.30	0.00	dynamic	2200	2000	9999	0.4	15	8000
GR2	0.10	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.00	dynamic	2000	1800	9999	1.0	15	8000
GR3	0.10	0.40	0.00	1.50	0.00	dynamic	1500	1300	9999	2.0	30	8000
GR4	0.25	0.00	0.00	1.90	0.00	dynamic	2000	1800	9999	2.0	15	8000
GR5	0.40	0.00	0.00	2.50	0.00	dynamic	1800	1600	9999	1.5	40	8000
GR6	0.10	0.00	0.00	3.40	0.00	dynamic	2200	2000	9999	1.5	40	9000
GR7	1.00	0.00	0.00	5.40	0.00	dynamic	2000	1800	9999	3.0	15	8000
GR8	0.50	1.00	0.00	7.30	0.00	dynamic	1500	1300	9999	4.0	30	8000
GR9	1.00	1.00	0.00	9.00	0.00	dynamic	1800	1600	9999	5.0	40	8000
GS1	0.20	0.00	0.00	0.50	0.65	dynamic	2000	1800	1800	0.9	15	8000
GS2	0.50	0.50	0.00	0.60	1.00	dynamic	2000	1800	1800	1.5	15	8000
GS3	0.30	0.25	0.00	1.45	1.25	dynamic	1800	1600	1600	1.8	40	8000
GS4	1.90	0.30	0.10	3.40	7.10	dynamic	1800	1600	1600	2.1	40	8000
SH1	0.25	0.25	0.00	0.15	1.30	dynamic	2000	1800	1600	1.0	15	8000
SH2	1.35	2.40	0.75	0.00	3.85	N/A	2000	9999	1600	1.0	15	8000
SH3	0.45	3.00	0.00	0.00	6.20	N/A	1600	9999	1400	2.4	40	8000
SH4	0.85	1.15	0.20	0.00	2.55	N/A	2000	1800	1600	3.0	30	8000
SH5	3.60	2.10	0.00	0.00	2.90	N/A	750	9999	1600	6.0	15	8000
SH6	2.90	1.45	0.00	0.00	1.40	N/A	750	9999	1600	2.0	30	8000
SH7	3.50	5.30	2.20	0.00	3.40	N/A	750	9999	1600	6.0	15	8000
SH8	2.05	3.40	0.85	0.00	4.35	N/A	750	9999	1600	3.0	40	8000
SH9	4.50	2.45	0.00	1.55	7.00	dynamic	750	1800	1500	4.4	40	8000
TU1	0.20	0.90	1.50	0.20	0.90	dynamic	2000	1800	1600	0.6	20	8000
TU2	0.95	1.80	1.25	0.00	0.20	N/A	2000	9999	1600	1.0	30	8000
TU3	1.10	0.15	0.25	0.65	1.10	dynamic	1800	1600	1400	1.3	30	8000
TU4	4.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	2.00	N/A	2300	9999	2000	0.5	12	8000
TU5	4.00	4.00	3.00	0.00	3.00	N/A	1500	9999	750	1.0	25	8000
TL1	1.00	2.20	3.60	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.2	30	8000
TL2	1.40	2.30	2.20	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.2	25	8000
TL3	0.50	2.20	2.80	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.3	20	8000
TL4	0.50	1.50	4.20	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.4	25	8000
TL5	1.15	2.50	4.40	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	1600	0.6	25	8000
TL6	2.40	1.20	1.20	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.3	25	8000
TL7	0.30	1.40	8.10	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	0.4	25	8000
TL8	5.80	1.40	1.10	0.00	0.00	N/A	1800	9999	9999	0.3	35	8000
TL9	6.65	3.30	4.15	0.00	0.00	N/A	1800	9999	1600	0.6	35	8000
SB1	1.50	3.00	11.00	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	1.0	25	8000
SB2	4.50	4.25	4.00	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	1.0	25	8000
SB3	5.50	2.75	3.00	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	1.2	25	8000
SB4	5.25	3.50	5.25	0.00	0.00	N/A	2000	9999	9999	2.7	25	8000

[a] Fuel model type does not apply to fuel models without live herbaceous load.
[b] The value 9999 was assigned in cases where there is no load in a particular fuel class or category
[c] The same heat content value was applied to both live and dead fuel categories.

Figure 1: Fuel Model Parameters

FBFMs are a collection of Fuel Loadings, Model types, Surface Area-to-Volume (SAV) ratios, bed depths, and extinction moisture parameters designed to predict how carbon on the landscape will release energy under different moisture and weather conditions. They were developed using formulas and inputs to generate the most common rates of spread, flame lengths (BTUs), and other fire behavior characteristics. **The FBFM approach is more physics and carbon-loading based than ecosystem-based.**

LANDFIRE has received expert feedback and calibration data over the last 15 years, which supports the current assignments as being the best representation of fire behavior in these areas. If LANDFIRE users have specific cases, modeling runs, and fire behavior observations that demonstrate the assignments are inaccurate, the LANDFIRE program highly encourages users to write in with that information, as it is helpful to continually improve models.