

Wildland Fire Management

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Branch of Wildland Fire
Division of Fire and Aviation



Communication Plan

March 2009



Matt Slater provides visitor information regarding the Dragon Complex at Mather Point, Grand Canyon National Park, 2005.
NPS Photo by Ron Brown.

...To promote and regulate the use of the...national parks...which purpose is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations.

The National Park Service Organic Act - August 25, 1916 - 16 U.S.C. 1 2 3, and 4

The National Park Service manages wildland fire to protect the public, communities and infrastructure, conserve natural and cultural resources, and restore and maintain ecological health.

National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Strategic Plan – 2008-2012

The National Park Service Division of Fire and Aviation Management – Branch of Wildland Fire worked with the communications firm Fleishman-Hillard to research and develop this communications initiative. Fleishman-Hillard will be assisting the national office with execution of this plan.

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Introduction

In conjunction with the 20th anniversary of the 1988 fires in Yellowstone National Park and the Northern Rockies, the National Park Service Division of Fire and Aviation Management has developed a communications initiative to reach internal and external audiences with a clear, consistent message about the role of wildland fire management in National Park Service units and surrounding communities.

The purpose of this initiative is to reinforce the National Park Service's position as a resource for fire management information and to better inform internal and external audiences about the role of wildland fire and the role of NPS Fire and Aviation in managing it. A subsequent goal is to reinforce the cultural significance of the National Park Service and its historical leadership in land management.

An updated communications approach is needed to enhance the stature of NPS as a resource for fire information in and around the national parks and explore new opportunities and avenues for communicating with key audiences about the NPS wildland fire program. This initiative will illustrate the significance of the history, culture, and mission of the Service. It also will communicate the correlating relationship of the Division of Fire and Aviation Branch of Wildland Fire with other NPS disciplines and leverage key learnings throughout other divisions. In addition to traditional methods of reaching target audiences, this initiative will leverage the advances in digital communication technology.

Situation Analysis

The National Park Service has long been a leader in fire communication among federal agencies. The Service has a rich history of engaging the public in learning about nature and ecology through our interpretive education and public outreach program and other means. Consider this: 2008 marked the 40th anniversary of the prescribed fire program at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and the 50th anniversary of prescribed fire at Everglades National Park. If NPS were to use the same communications techniques today as back then, the program will not continue to succeed.

The NPS faces additional challenges as it coordinates with other federal agencies. The Service has the same mission to protect the public, but also has the mission to preserve, maintain, and restore the land that it manages. NPS focuses on using fire to meet ecological objectives when conditions allow. This may mean, for example, that there are times when NPS is using fire to benefit the ecosystem, while another agency is trying to suppress the same fire just across the administrative border. How does NPS explain the differing objectives to the public?

While NPS cannot solve this challenge alone, it is working closely with other agency leaders to address the issues. In the meantime, NPS is continuing to work toward better public understanding while not contradicting the interagency approach. With the ever changing world of online and nontraditional communications tactics, there is a need to revamp the strategies for reaching the public as well as employees with fire information. The fact is that key audience members have many options for finding this information — both online and through other resources. Given the increased reliance on bloggers and other online platforms, it is a challenge to remain relevant within this space.

Employee Survey

In an effort to effectively create a communications plan that reaches the target audience of the NPS Fire and Aviation Branch of Wildland Fire, an extensive online employee survey was conducted to gather feedback regarding the success of current communication practices. The findings from the online survey were considered and incorporated into the recommendations found in this communication plan. For example, most of the employees targeted for this study are well aware of the Service's responsibility for and engagement in fire management on NPS land. The sources through which they have heard about the wildland fire program in the past year are enlightening: among the top five sources, three of the five are either electronic (InsideNPS, e-mail) or word-of-mouth (colleagues at NPS) sources. While employees may need exposure and encouragement to use online social media tools, they may quickly adopt them given their current reliance on word-of-mouth — especially among younger employees.

In the eyes of employees, prescribed fire support and wildfire suppression support are the cornerstone of NPS's Wildland Fire Program, and as such, should continue to be highlighted and promoted within the Service. In addition employees' single most frequently volunteered strength or defining characteristic that they associate with the program is "Fire ecology/use of fire as a natural resource management tool."

The survey results also provide direction for groups of employees that may benefit most from outreach efforts, based on their current level of awareness and their role in carrying out the NPS mission and in communicating that mission to the public. The complete executive summary of survey results is included in the [Appendix](#) of this plan. For the full scope of the survey results, please see the drop-down menu at <http://inside.nps.gov/fire/wildland>.

Public Education

When considering external audiences, public education is necessary to the success of fire management programs. Fire is an important issue for the public and NPS employees, and public understanding is key to the Service's ability to effectively manage wildland fire. For many years, people have learned to fear and avoid fires of all kinds in wildland areas – whether they are natural or started by people. While this is an understandable response to extreme fires and losses, there is more to the story of fire. Understanding the role of fire will help neighboring landowners and park visitors appreciate and support land management efforts.

Every year, millions of people visit and use the national parks. People are fascinated with fire, and national parks have the opportunity to showcase its benefits/role. NPS encourages landowners and park visitors to mitigate fire hazards on private property, use recreational fire safely, and support fire management efforts so the bureau can focus on public lands. This will ultimately reduce loss of life, property, and natural resources.

Public education efforts need to be clear about both the risks and benefits of wildland fire. Often people's perception of fire is shaped by extreme fire events and the negative representation of fire in the media and other channels. The NPS can help residents and park visitors understand the broader context by sharing comprehensive information about fire and the management issues facing federal, state, tribal, and local fire management organizations.

Communications Initiative

Although designed to serve the NPS Fire and Aviation Management program, the intent is to have this communications initiative serve as a pilot to enhance internal and external communications Servicewide. It should be noted that the Division of Fire and Aviation Management is comprised of three separate branches: Wildland Fire, Structural Fire, and Aviation. This project was focused on the Branch of Wildland Fire Management. The information learned from this project will benefit the Structural Fire and Aviation branches as their communications efforts continue to expand.

Key Audiences

This initiative considers both internal and external audiences, as well as the people who influence those audiences. To ensure consistent communication with *external* audiences, NPS must be sure to communicate with the *internal* audiences as well. Interdisciplinary understanding of the fire management program within the National Park Service will have a ripple effect within and outside of the agency.

Key audiences include:

Internal audiences: All National Park Service employees, with emphasis on the following:

- Park superintendents and leadership teams
- Interpreters and educators
- Public information officers
- Park Cooperating Associations and concessions staff
- Resource Management

External audiences:

- Wildland-urban interface residents
- Park visitors
- Outdoor enthusiasts
- Environmental groups
- Wildland fire community
- Natural resource and resource management professionals
- Elected officials
- Students/educators

Message Platform

The cornerstone of any communication effort is a set of consistent, compelling messages for use in all proactive and reactive communication. Following are the key messages for the National Park Service's wildland fire program. These messages are designed to meet the following criteria:

- **Coincide with and not contradict interagency messages.** It is critical that the wildland fire community speak with one voice to the public. The NPS wildland fire messages are designed to complement the interagency messages listed below. The NPS wildland fire messages also are designed to be fluid. These messages do not address specific policy issues. NPS staff will rely on policy-related messages as they are revised.
 - Annual NIFC public affairs messages
 - Messages outlined in the [Modification of Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy Guidance Communication Plan](#) (July 2008), and subsequent releases.
 - The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Wildland Fire Education Working Team (WFEWT) messages. The WFEWT messages have been through an extensive interagency development and review process, and have been approved by the NWCG.
- **Allow for customization.** These messages are a guide, not a script. Users are encouraged to provide additional, local detail to ensure the messages touch audiences in a relevant, credible way.
- **Include a call to action.** In addition to educating, messages should motivate the audiences to act on what they have learned.
- **Answer the questions what, why, and how.** Categorizing messages in this way will help users recall the messages during appropriate situations.

Key messages are general concepts that can be incorporated into discussions, print materials, and other resources used in communication, education, information, and prevention efforts. Key messages are umbrella statements that require additional supporting points and examples for context.

Supporting points provide detail for the key messages and enable individuals to further explain the identified topic and reach audiences on a personal level.

Key Messages

Following are the core messages for this initiative. These messages with supporting points are included in the [appendix](#).

Question	Key Message
What	1. The National Park Service is a leader in the wildland fire community.
	2. The National Park Service wildland fire management program is committed to safety, science, and stewardship.
Why	3. Wildland fire is an essential, natural process.
	4. <i>Science tells the story:</i> Today's environment includes hotter, drier, and longer fire seasons. Research also indicates poor ecosystem health and an increasing number of homes in fire prone areas.
How	5. The National Park Service works with our neighbors and other partners to preserve and protect park resources and mitigate wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface (WUI).

Strategy

Based on research findings, including the results of the NPS employee survey, information from the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center and other agencies and research studies, the objective of this initiative is to leverage existing information and use key messages to reach targeted audiences through multiple channels, including traditional methods and digital communication channels. This information will lend credibility to our messages and continue to improve the stature of NPS as a resource for fire management information. In addition, the use of both traditional and digital communication channels will provide new opportunities and avenues for distributing information about NPS Fire and Aviation.

An important part of implementing the communication plan is to develop a dialogue with key audience members including media and target groups. In addition to providing media and target groups with relevant information and NPS Fire and Aviation updates, NPS should look for important events and anniversaries to use as hooks for media outreach.

Tactics

To effectively communicate our messages with the target audiences, this initiative will use a mix of traditional outreach methods as well as digital communication channels. This section delineates actions that will be managed by the National Office and actions that NPS recommends for regions and parks. These are high level suggestions. The National Office encourages regions and parks to continue to be creative and execute outreach tactics relevant for each area.

Additional tactics will be added based on successes and lessons learned.

Internal Communication

National Office

- Develop a series of communications materials to support the overall campaign, including fact sheets, Web content, and template communications tools for individual national parks.
- Develop communication training for superintendents, interpreters, and public information officers.
- Create a Fire and Aviation workshop or Wildland Fire workshop that can be incorporated into annual training within the parks and their partners. This will include a PowerPoint and potentially a Web-based interactive learning module.
- Leverage existing channels for internal agency communications.
 - Agency newsletters (e.g., InsideNPS; *Morning Report*; *People, Land and Water*; *Arrowhead Newsletter*)
 - Agency meetings
- Use digital communication channels for distributing information to internal audiences, as described in the Digital Communications section below.

Regional and Park Communication Recommendations

As stated earlier, to ensure consistent communication with *external* audiences, communicating with the *internal* audiences is essential. This plan is designed to serve as the core document for the communication and education efforts of the national program. It is critical that regional and park level programs tier their program efforts to *mirror the messages and the methods* to meet their specific needs. Guidance for regional and park level programming can be found at:

- Reference Manual 18, Communication and Education chapter – http://www.nps.gov/fire/download/fir_wil_rm18.pdf (page 343).
- Templates for regional and park level program reviews can be found at: http://www.nifc.gov/policies/preparedness_reviews/NPS_program_reviews.htm

Key Tactics

- Localize materials produced by National Office for use in regional and park communications.
- Host training session for employees, using workshop tools provided by National Office. This may be a session focused on one park division, such as Fire or Interpretation, or incorporated into a broader staff meeting.
- Others based on staff availability and expertise.

Media Relations and Community Outreach

The media relations portion includes a mix of traditional and nontraditional media outlets, including trade and consumer publications, major dailies, broadcast media, and community outreach. The initiative will explore opportunities to best communicate the key messages through press releases, targeted media pitches, and leveraging milestones and announcements.

National Office

- Focus on outreach to national and regional trade media, such as those listed below. The National Office will review editorial calendars for timely pitches and reach out to media as opportunistic topics arise. For example, target reporters during wildfires and other timely events, such as the announcement of recent studies and key milestones and anniversaries of historic wildfires or events in the wildland fire community.
 - Key publications in the fire and aviation community, such as *Wildland Firefighter*, *Fire Chief Magazine*, *The Dispatch* (NVFC - National Volunteer Fire Council).
 - Trade and consumer publications targeted toward external audiences, including outdoor and recreation enthusiasts, environmental groups, K-12 science teachers, wildland/urban interface residents, and natural resource and resource management professionals.
 - Major national dailies with specific focus on fire and environmental beat reporters.
- The National Office may work with local media directly and/or with regional and park staff to communicate national objectives and highlight activities at the local park that reflect the overall fire management strategy for the service.
- Work with third party organizations to reach their members, such as the National Parks Conservation Association, The National Park Foundation, Audubon Society, Girl Scouts / Boy Scouts. Provide information for newsletters, Web sites, and other communication channels.
- Provide fact sheets and media template materials for use by regional and park program specialists.
- Facilitate opportunities for regional offices and parks to discuss outreach tips and share best practices. These may include Webinars, e-mail listservs, and other means.

Regional and Park Community Outreach Recommendations

Regional and park fire communication and education contacts should coordinate with the designated regional and local NPS public affairs staff in order to work within the unit's specific media guidelines and protocol. (Note guidance for regional and park level fire programs cited above.)

Key Tactics

- Regional office contacts should work with the national office to communicate national objectives and highlight activities at local parks that reflect the overall fire management strategy for the National Park Service.
- Develop a media outreach plan to reach regional and local media.
- Assist and provide support to parks within the region with media and community outreach needs and products as appropriate.

Digital Communication

Note: An explanation of digital terms is included in the [appendix](#).

National Office

- **Communications Platform:** Work with contractor to design and develop a Web site portal. Objectives of the site include:
 - Communicate NPS updates on current fires, road closures, and other key information for the community as well as delivering educational information related to key messages.
 - Coordinate with existing or developing NPS blog structure.
 - Provide links to local parks, sister agencies, and additional resources.
 - Resource Library: Area where NPS and its sister agencies can share information, documents, and events with the public.
 - Integration of basic search engine optimization (SEO) strategies.
 - Integration of [Twitter](#) channel into the site, offering up-to-the-minute updates on current fires, road closures, and important community information.
 - Incorporation of wildfire-related news from various online sources.
 - Discussion Board: Place where readers can post and facilitate dialogue around parks, fire prevention, and awareness.
 - Visitors can sign up to receive alerts about area wildfires and dangerous conditions via e-mail or [RSS feeds](#). A RSS feed is a tool used to receive updated content from multiple Web sources in one standardized format. (Note: this component will be used to build list for potential text message campaign.)
 - User-Generated Media: Allow visitors to upload and share photos of wildfires and areas impacted by wildfire, with the possibility of enabling comments. (May use flickr to power.)
 - Multimedia Gallery: Page on the site that enables visitors to view videos and photos related to the campaign.

- **Promotion: Online Editorial Outreach**
 - Identify bloggers in relevant spaces, including NPS and conservation enthusiasts, wildfire prevention and fire fighter bloggers, and geographically relevant bloggers.
 - Reach out to bloggers of national prominence.

- **Promotion: Pay Per Click (PPC) Campaign**
 - Run PPC campaigns in Google, where the NPS site will appear as a sponsored link in keyword searches. Example keywords may include “wildfire,” “wildfire prevention,” “California wildfire,” and/or park specific terms such as “wildfire in Sequoia National Park.” Also include geographically target specific areas of the country where fires are occurring.

- **Educational Seminar: How to Write for the Web**

Host teleconference for NPS communications teams led by Fleishman-Hillard experts on how to adapt your writing style for the internet. Topics will include:

 - Analysis of how people read and consume information online.
 - Online style guide tips including how to write shorter, casual posts.
 - How to incorporate targeted keywords into your content to maximize your search engine visibility.
 - How to research, target, and communicate online with bloggers.

Regional and Park Recommendations

Fire staff and/or other designees are encouraged to participate in educational seminar on writing for the Web hosted by National Office, and then use what they learn to reach out to regional and local bloggers and incorporate messages into park-specific Web sites.

Key Tactics:

- Regional office contacts should communicate existence of the Fire Communication Platform to parks within region promoting the opportunity to disseminate information through use of new media.
- Assist parks within region to communicate NPS updates on fire activities and other key information for the community as well as delivering educational information related to key messages.
- Provide expertise on use of new media associated with Fire Communication Platform.

APPENDIX A: Key Messages and Supporting Points

These messages are designed to answer the questions what, why, and how. Categorizing messages in this way will help users recall the messages during appropriate situations.

Question	Key Message	Supporting Points <i>Use local or regional examples</i>
What	<p>1. The National Park Service is a leader in the wildland fire community.</p>	<p>A. For nearly 100 years, the National Park Service has been a steward of public land. It is our responsibility to manage the land in a manner that will provide sustainable environmental and social benefits for current and future generations.</p> <p>B. The management of wildland fire has been part of the core mission of the National Park Service since its inception. We understand the historic role of wildland fire on public lands and our duty in the protection of the public and communities.</p> <p>C. The National Park Service has long been a leader in fire communication among federal agencies. We have a rich history of engaging the public in learning about nature and ecology through our interpretive education and public outreach program and other means.</p>
	<p>2. The National Park Service wildland fire management program is committed to safety, science, and stewardship.</p>	<p>A. Safety is our core value. 1. Safety of firefighters and the public is the No. 1 priority of all NPS wildland fire management activities.</p> <p>B. The NPS has wildland fire management programs within parks which work with neighboring communities, preserve natural and cultural resources, restore the land to more natural conditions, and maintain already healthy ecosystems. 1. Our fire management program is focused on the risks and benefits related to fire management in the National Parks. Communicating the need for fire use, prevention and suppression to protect people and communities is key to effectively managing wildland fire and the land. 2. Changing environmental conditions and increasing numbers of large fires require more flexibility and use of a wider variety of responses, enabling us to increase public and firefighter safety and effectiveness. 3. Our approach is designed to increase safety for firefighters through less exposure on the fireline, increase effective use of available resources, and help reduce the hazardous accumulation of overgrown vegetation.</p> <p>C. Fire is a management tool used to accomplish specific objectives in a plan such as removal of excess vegetation or stimulating plant growth and regeneration. 1. Naturally occurring fires (lightning, etc.) are either suppressed or allowed to burn in a closely monitored and confined area, based on the fire management plan for the area.</p>

	<p>2. Sometimes it may be necessary and/or beneficial for land managers to ignite fires in a closely monitored and confined area to reduce hazardous fuel loads near developed areas, manage landscapes, and achieve ecological benefits. These fires are referred to as “prescribed fires.”</p> <p>3. A fire program also may include non-fire treatments in situations where prescribed fire is not feasible or to prepare the land before natural or prescribed fire can be applied safely and effectively.</p>
<p>Why</p> <p>3. Wildland fire is an essential, natural process.</p>	<p>A. Fire has helped shape our wildlands for thousands of years, and is important for the survival of many plants and animals.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Fire reduces accumulation of vegetation that can inhibit new plant growth. 2. Some plants and animals depend on fire for survival. Periodic fire stimulates growth, reproduction of plants, and provides wildlife habitat. 3. In addition, excess vegetation and lack of fire in some areas is threatening plant and animal life. <p>B. Fire behaves differently throughout the country.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In addition to fuels (vegetation), fire behavior is affected by weather and terrain. 2. Virtually all vegetation types in the United States can experience wildland fire.
	<p>4. Science tells the story: Today’s environment includes hotter, drier, and longer fire seasons. Research also indicates poor ecosystem health and an increasing number of homes in fire prone areas.</p> <p>A. Social and cultural approaches to wildland fire over the past century have focused on preventing and suppressing the majority of wildland fire. This has led to a dangerous build-up of vegetation in our wildlands.</p> <p>B. Our fire management program is grounded in general and park-specific science. We continue to learn and now have a more complete understanding of the essential role fire plays in our environment.</p> <p>C. When paired with the right terrain and weather conditions, dense build-up of vegetation leads to fires that burn hotter, last longer, and spread faster. As a result, these fires become difficult to manage and can threaten areas of residential development.</p> <p>D. Additional supporting points to consider under Science in the future include Burned Area Response and rehabilitation technology.</p>
<p>How</p> <p>5. The National Park Service works with our neighbors and other partners to preserve and protect park resources and mitigate wildfire risk in the wildland-urban</p>	<p>A. NPS is working with other agencies, tribes, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local fire departments, and communities to understand and accept what it means to live in a fire-prone area and to realize the benefits of managing fire in the wildlands while protecting lives and resources.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. NPS and other agencies and tribes are managing public and tribal lands through overarching fire management plans and programs.

interface (WUI).

2. NPS and other agencies and tribes also are working with local governments and property owners to make their land and property more defensible against wildfire.
- B. People who live and recreate in fire-prone lands assume a certain level of risk and responsibility due to the condition of the surrounding environment.
1. People can live compatibly with fire, if actions are taken to be aware of – and prepared for – local fire conditions.
 1. Before a fire starts, contact your local park or other local, state, or federal agencies, or tribal fire management organization to determine your community's fire conditions and learn tips to reduce your community's fire vulnerability.
 2. The more populated and closer a community is to fire-prone areas, the greater the need for proactive fire management.
 2. Smoke from prescribed fire is a sign that steps are being taken to reduce risks and realize benefits of fire. The more NPS and other land management agencies can plan and manage fire, the more we can reduce smoke impacts.
- C. Fire burns where conditions are right. Fire does not acknowledge jurisdictional boundaries of federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; or private landowners.

APPENDIX B: Digital Communication Glossary of Terms

The following is a basic list of terms and definitions used in digital communications. For background information on additional digital communication terms that may be used in the future, a simple Wikipedia.com search is typical the best resource for new terms in this area.

Blogs or weblogs – A Web site, usually maintained by an individual, with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse chronological order. “Blog” is also a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog.

Micro-blogging – Brief posts to a personal blog on a micro-blogging Web site, such as Twitter. Microposts can be made public on a Web site and/or distributed to a private group of subscribers. Subscribers can read micro-blog posts online or request that updates be delivered in real time to their desktop as an instant message or sent to a mobile device as an SMS text message.

RSS feed – Short for Really Simple Syndication. A family of Web feed formats used to publish frequently updated content such as blog entries, news headlines, and podcasts in a standardized format. An RSS document (called a “feed”, “Web feed,” or “channel”) contains either a summary of content from an associated Web site or the full text. RSS makes it possible for people to keep up with Web sites in an automated manner.

Search engine optimization (SEO) – SEO is the process of improving the volume and quality of traffic to a Web site from search engines via “natural” (“organic” or “algorithmic”) search results. Usually, the earlier a site is presented in the search results, or the higher it “ranks,” the more searchers will visit that site. SEO can also target different kinds of search, including image search, local search, and industry-specific vertical search engines.

SMS – Short message service or SMS is a [communications protocol](#) allowing the interchange of short text messages between [mobile telephone devices](#). SMS text messaging is the most widely used data application on the planet.

Social media – Term for the tools and platforms people use to publish, converse and share content online. The tools include blogs, wikis, podcasts, and sites to share photos and bookmarks.

Social networking sites – Online places where users can create a profile for themselves, and then socialize with others using a range of social media tools including blogs, video, images, tagging, lists of friends, forums, and messaging.

Twitter – A social networking and micro-blogging service that allows its users to send and read other users' updates (otherwise known as tweets), which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length.

Web 2.0 – Term to describe blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and other Internet-based services that emphasize collaboration and sharing, rather than less interactive publishing (Web 1.0). It is associated with the idea of the Internet as a platform.

Wiki – Web site that allows users to add and update content on the site using their own Web browser.

APPENDIX C: Employee Survey Executive Summary

In an effort to better communicate with National Park Service employees, the NPS Wildland Fire Program, through the U.S. Department of the Interior, commissioned Fleishman-Hillard to obtain feedback from a targeted group of NPS employees.

- The responsibilities and role of fire management within NPS.
- Communication habits, tools, and preferences.
- Interest level in receiving information about the Wildland Fire Program.

These efforts will help NPS refine its messaging and communication effort, making these efforts more effective and relevant to the key stakeholder groups.

Key Findings

1. Almost all NPS employees surveyed are aware that the agency has direct responsibility and is actively engaged in fire management on NPS land.
 - Nine out of 10 (92 percent) employees say they are “very aware” that the National Park Service has direct responsibility and is actively engaged in fire management on NPS land. A further 6 percent state they are “somewhat aware” of this responsibility. Only one person, out of the 433 who completed the survey, said he/she never knew that NPS has this responsibility.
2. Most employees have seen, read, or heard something about the NPS Wildland Fire Program in the past 12 months.
 - A plurality (86 percent) of employees who have some knowledge that the National Park Service has direct responsibility and is actively engaged in fire management on NPS land, have seen, read, or heard something about the NPS Wildland Fire Program in the past 12 months.
 - When asked where they had seen, read, or heard about the Wildland Fire Program, at least half of the employees mentioned five specific sources:
 - Internal NPS memo or report
 - Colleagues at NPS
 - InsideNPS
 - E-mail
 - Newspapers
3. A majority of employees believe that the primary role of wildland fire management should be the *protection of resources and prevention of fires*.
 - Based on the number of coded responses to this open-ended question, it is clear that the employees think that wildland fire management should have a multi-dimensional role in fire management.
 - Most (70 percent) of the coded responses fell under the category of protection and prevention. An additional 29 percent of the coded responses were related to public awareness.
 - The single, most common coded response by employees was related to providing prescribed burns* and managing fires, which was volunteered by 41 percent of the employees. This was closely followed by protection of natural and cultural resources and public safety, mentioned by 36 percent of the employees.

* Some employees used the phrase “controlled burns” when responding to various survey questions regarding priorities.
4. A majority of NPS employees are aware of the Wildland Fire Program’s responsibilities and believe the program is doing a good job.
 - Prior knowledge of the Wildland Fire Program’s responsibility is high among NPS employees. Even the least known of the responsibilities garnered recognition by almost two-thirds of the employees.

- NPS employees are most aware that the Wildland Fire Program is responsible for wildfire suppression support, prescribed fire support, wildland fire training support, and communication and dissemination within the agency about wildland fire management on NPS land.

These results indicate that the Wildland Fire Program and/or the NPS, are doing a good job communicating the varied responsibilities of the program across the agency. Widespread knowledge tends to lead to widespread support.

5. One of most recognizable characteristics of the Wildland Fire Program is its support in fighting, preventing, and managing fires.
 - Of the 15 specific Wildland Fire Program's responsibilities that were rated by employees, the six that include "support" received some of the highest performance ratings of all specific responsibilities.
 - Using a scale ranging from "poor" to "excellent," NPS employees feel that the Wildland Fire Program is performing the best at:
 - Wildfire suppression support
 - Prescribed fire support
 - Wildland fire training support
6. The NPS, particularly the Wildland Fire Program, appears to be communicating frequently and effectively with external and internal audiences.
 - NPS employees were least likely to respond "don't know" when asked to rate the performance of the Wildland Fire Program on *communicating and disseminating information about wildland fire management on NPS land* (both within NPS and to the public). Put another way, out of 15 specific responsibilities, employees are most aware of the communications efforts of the NPS (and thus are able to rate them), indicating that the NPS is communicating frequently.
7. Performance ratings appear to be positively correlated to awareness levels of the Wildland Fire Program's responsibilities.
 - This may indicate that as the NPS employees become more aware of the various responsibilities of the Wildland Fire Program, the more likely they are to give the NPS a better rating on its performance in each corresponding area of responsibility.
8. Skills and abilities, as well as the knowledge of employees, are perceived to be the primary strengths of the Wildland Fire Program.
 - Over half (53 percent) of the employees feel that the skills and abilities of the employees within the program, and of the program itself, are core strengths (categorically coded from responses to an open-ended question).
 - In terms of top individually coded responses, the program's uses of fire as a natural resource management tool, as well as the knowledge and experience of the employees within the program, are seen as the two greatest strengths of the Wildland Fire Program.
9. Funding and budget concerns are viewed as the biggest obstacle for the Wildland Fire Program.
 - Several key obstacles were identified by NPS employees that they feel will hinder the Wildland Fire Program's effectiveness. These obstacles, grouped together as broad categories, each accounted for approximately one-fourth of the feedback received on this topic (percentage total feedback in parenthesis). These category obstacles include:
 - Personnel/Budget/Size (30 percent)
 - Communication/Cooperation (26 percent)
 - Management/Priorities (22 percent)
 - Other (21 percent)

- In terms of top individually coded responses, funding/budget concerns were identified as the biggest obstacle limiting the effectiveness of the Wildland Fire Program to carry out its mission/purpose.
10. Based on peer selection, employees feel that resource management staff and park rangers/interpretation employees are two functions that can help the NPS achieve its mission. (Question 10 on which this finding is based asked about the mission of the NPS in general.)
 - In total, half (53 percent) of the employees selected park rangers/interpretation most frequently as the function within the National Park Service that can help the agency achieve its mission, second only to resource management staff (68 percent).
 11. The primary external and internal audiences to whom the Wildland Fire Program should communicate its role and responsibilities are wildland/urban interface residents, and, internally, superintendents.
 - One in three (35 percent) NPS employees selected wildland/urban interface residents as the most important external group to communicate with, which is twice that of the next highest mention — elected officials at the local and state level (16 percent).
 - Of the ten internal audiences that were identified as important internal stakeholders to communicate with, only three garnered more than 50 percent support (in the form of being ranked among the top three). Superintendents received the highest number of “most important” responses, but park rangers/interpretation received the most selections in the top-three, at 69 percent.
 12. Employees are most likely to frequently use communications tools that have been around for a while and that employees feel comfortable with, such as e-mail, telephones, and the Internet.
 - Based on the survey results, it appears that NPS employees are not currently using newer forms of digital communication, either at work or during their personal time, instead preferring to rely on older, more established forms to send and receive information. However, this doesn’t mean that they wouldn’t use newer tools – it merely suggests that they are using what they have been exposed to and know.
 13. Most employees show interest in learning more about the Wildland Fire Program’s responsibilities and how it carries out its mission.
 - Eight out of ten (82 percent) employees said they were at least somewhat interested in learning more, and almost half (46 percent) said they are very interested
 14. Park rangers/interpretation staff members, as well as fire staff members, appear to have the widest support among employees as spokespeople who can speak on behalf of the Wildland Fire Program.
 - One employee in three (34 percent) suggests that park rangers/interpretation could speak on behalf of the Wildland Fire Program.
 - Coded responses to this open-ended question show that grouped collectively, employees involved with fire management appear to be the most logical choice among NPS employees. Eight of the 20 specific types of positions volunteered by survey respondents are related to fire.

Research Findings-Communications Implications

The following is a list of eight communications implications determined based on the survey results.

Communication Implication #1

Most of the employees targeted for this study are well aware of the agency's responsibility for and engagement in fire management on NPS land and even recall seeing, reading, or hearing about the Wildland Fire Program in the past year. The sources through which they have heard about the Program are enlightening: among the top five sources, three of the five are either electronic (InsideNPS, e-mail) or word-of-mouth (colleagues at NPS) sources, suggesting that these employees may also be receptive to social media tools as a way to stay informed about the Wildland Fire Program, since these tools combine elements of word-of-mouth with electronic media.

However, the survey findings also indicate that employees are not currently likely to use social media tools during their personal time or while at work (e.g., Twitter, MySpace, FaceBook, YouTube, blogs). Instead, they tend to most frequently rely on tools that have been around for a while; e.g., e-mail, telephones, and the Internet. This suggests that while employees may need exposure and encouragement to use these tools, they may quickly adopt them given their current reliance on word-of-mouth (especially younger employees).

Communication Implication #2

Employees are well aware that prescribed fire support and fire suppression support are part of the Wildland Fire Program's responsibilities. They are also likely to volunteer both of these as part of the role wildland fire management has within the NPS units and surrounding communities. In addition, many employees assign high marks to NPS for its prescribed fire support and wildland suppression support (these two areas receive the largest proportions of positive ratings from employees). Finally, "fire ecology/use of fire as a natural resource management tool" is employees' single most frequently volunteered strength or defining characteristic that they associate with the Program. In the eyes of employees, these two functions are clearly the cornerstone of NPS's Wildland Fire Program, and as such, should continue to be highlighted and promoted within NPS. Nevertheless, employees may also benefit from learning more about Program areas with which they are less familiar (e.g., Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER), and search and rescue (SAR)).

Communication Implication #3

Personnel and budget concerns are the obstacles that employees most frequently volunteered as the ones that limit the NPS Wildland Fire Program's effectiveness. In particular, employees, especially fire management staff, most frequently mentioned funding/budget concerns, lack of personnel, and staff concerns (e.g., unqualified staff). These areas represent ones that the Program should consider addressing – perhaps from an operation as well as communications standpoint.

Communication Implication #4

Within the NPS, employees were more likely to select several audiences for the Program to engage and keep informed. These internal audiences are superintendents (identified most frequently as the internal audience with whom the Program should communicate, and also ranks third as being "most important" in helping NPS achieve its mission). Externally, wildland/urban interface residents stand head and shoulders above others in terms of being selected by employees as the "most important" audience for the Program to engage and keep informed. These findings provide the Program with direction, both internally and externally, on who they should actively engage as part of its communications and outreach efforts.

Communication Implication #5

Most employees are interested in learning more about the Wildland Fire Program, and they tend to prefer electronic and oral forms of communications for this purpose. The latter form of communication, i.e., in-person presentations by Division of Fire and Aviation employees, may provide the Program with the

opportunity to use social media (e.g., YouTube) to more broadly and conveniently disseminate oral presentations as a way to get out the word regarding the Program, particularly in more remote regions such as the Alaska region.

Communication Implication #6

The survey findings help identify the types of employee groups that appear to be less informed about the Wildland Fire Program (e.g., newer employees, natural and cultural resource staff members) and, therefore, can help the program target its communications efforts where appropriate. For example, employees identified natural and cultural resource staff as key to helping the NPS achieve its mission and as a focus of internal communication, yet appear to be (based on the survey findings) less informed (about Wildland Fire Program responsibilities). Therefore, a specific internal effort targeted toward this group is warranted. Also, if the Program targets its communications efforts geographically, it may want to reach out to the National Capitol Region because this region is less likely than others to be aware that NPS has direct responsibility and is actively engaged in fire management on NPS land, yet is a potentially important region in terms of Agency leadership. (Proximity to the NPS Washington office.)

Communication Implication #7

Public affairs officers overwhelmingly think the primary role of wildland fire management is suppression/assist in fire fighting/control unplanned fires. Given that public affairs officers have the primary responsibility for media and other public outreach, this audience should be informed of the full scope of NPS wildland fire management responsibilities – especially in the areas the Program would like the public to be most aware.

Communication Implication #8

Based on specific findings regarding park rangers/interpretation employees, the Wildland Fire Program should consider this group a high priority as it relates to informing employees about the Wildland Fire Program's role and responsibilities.

1. Just under three fourths of park rangers/interpretation employees indicate they are at least somewhat interested in wanting to learn more about the Wildland Fire Program, the smallest percentage of any of the employee groups.
2. The NPS employees who participated in this survey frequently selected park rangers/interpretation as the "most important" function in the National Park Service to whom the Wildland Fire Program should communicate its role and responsibilities.

APPENDIX D: Release Memo – Wildland Fire Management Communication Plan



United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

*****ELECTRONIC TRANSMITTAL ONLY. NO HARD COPY TO FOLLOW*****

IN REPLY REFER TO:
Y14 (9560)

MAR 12 2009

Memorandum

To: Regional Directors
Attention: Superintendents

From: Associate Director, Visitor and Resource Protection

Subject: Wildland Fire Management Communication Plan

In October 2008, the Division of Fire and Aviation commissioned an extensive online employee survey to gather feedback regarding the success of current communication practices for the Branch of Wildland Fire. The response to the survey was high, with over 45% of the participants providing feedback and thoughtful insights to the general and open ended questions. The survey information was incorporated into the key messages and recommendations found in the 2009 Wildland Fire Management Communication Plan.

The primary objective of the survey was to learn from employees across the NPS how the division can improve upon existing communication methods in order to develop an effective communication plan. Highlights from the survey include:

- Employees are well aware of the NPS' fire management program.
- Three of the top five sources through which employees have heard about the wildland fire management program are either electronic (InsideNPS, e-mail) or word of mouth (colleagues at NPS) sources. While employees may need exposure and encouragement to use online social media tools, they may quickly adopt them given their current reliance on word-of-mouth – especially among younger employees.
- Prescribed fire support and wildfire suppression support are the cornerstone of NPS' Wildland Fire Program, and as such, should continue to be highlighted and promoted within the NPS. In addition, the single, most frequently cited strength or defining characteristic that they associate with the program is "Fire ecology/use of fire as a natural resource management tool."

Not surprisingly, the survey provided evidence of the critical need for interdisciplinary support from the the partnerships we have within our own agency. Thank you for your continued and future support – the program cannot succeed without you. For the full scope of the survey results, please see the drop-down menu at <http://inside.nps.gov/fire/wildland>.

The communication plan is a tool which can be used by various levels and disciplines within the organization to provide consistent messages and supporting points for all proactive and reactive communications about the wildland fire program. The messages highlight NPS leadership in the wildland fire community; our commitment to safety, science, and stewardship; that wildland fire is an essential, natural process; that science tells our story; and that the NPS works with neighbors and other partners to preserve and protect park resources and mitigate wildfire risk in the wildland-urban interface.

The plan provides recommendations for national, regional, and park level fire communication and education programs. Initial outreach tactics are listed, and future approaches and products are described including social networking tools and methods. We are working closely with the office of the Chief Information Officer and invite your participation as we explore the new age of digital communications to relay our safety and educational messages about wildland fire.

The 2009 Wildland Fire Management Communication Plan is available for your review at the website noted above. If you have questions or comments, please contact Roberta D'Amico, Communication and Education Program Lead, Division of Fire and Aviation at: Roberta_D'Amico@nps.gov.

cc: Associate Regional Directors, Operations
Associate Regional Directors, Natural Resources
Regional Fire Management Officers

-END-