

Wildland Fire Key Messages

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Division of Fire and Aviation



The National Park Service is a leader in the wildland fire community.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

The National Park Service wildland fire management program is committed to safety, science, and stewardship.

- Safety is our core value.
 - Safety of firefighters and the public is the No. 1 priority of all NPS wildland fire management activities.
- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - 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.
 - 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.”
 - 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.

Wildland fire is an essential, natural process.

- Fire has helped shape our wildlands for thousands of years, and is important for the survival of many plants and animals.
 - Fire reduces accumulation of vegetation that can inhibit new plant growth.

Wildland fire is an essential, natural process, cont.

- Some plants and animals depend on fire for survival. Periodic fire stimulates growth, reproduction of plants, and provides wildlife habitat.
- In addition, excess vegetation and lack of fire in some areas is threatening plant and animal life.
- Fire behaves differently throughout the country.
 - In addition to fuels (vegetation), fire behavior is affected by weather and terrain.
 - Virtually all vegetation types in the U.S. can experience wildland fire.

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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Additional supporting points to consider under Science in the future include Burned Area Response and rehabilitation technology.

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).

- 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.
 - NPS and other agencies and tribes are managing public and tribal lands through overarching fire management plans and programs.
 - 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.
- 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.
 - People can live compatibly with fire, if actions are taken to be aware of – and prepared for – local fire conditions.
 - 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.
 - The more populated and closer a community is to fire-prone areas, the greater the need for proactive fire management.
 - 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.
- Fire burns where conditions are right. Fire does not acknowledge jurisdictional boundaries of federal, state, and local agencies; tribes; or private landowners.