

NPS Management Policies 2006

6.3.9 Fire Management (*specific policy for NPS wilderness*)

All fire management activities conducted in wilderness areas will conform to the basic purposes of wilderness. Actions taken to suppress wildfires must use the minimum requirements concept unless the on-site decision-maker determines in his professional judgment that conditions dictate otherwise. Preplanning is critical to ensure that emergency response incorporates minimum requirements to the greatest extent possible. Fire suppression activities should be managed in ways that protect natural and cultural resources and minimize the lasting impacts of the suppression actions. Information on developing a fire management program in wilderness is contained in [Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management](#).

Guidance on the need to suppress wildland fire or to use some wildland fires to achieve desired future conditions should appear in the park's planning documents (for example, in the wilderness management plan and fire management plan). Information in these documents will guide managers in the selection of fire management tactics that protect natural and cultural resources from fire and from fire suppression actions.

The park's fire management plan will provide guidance for responses to natural and human-caused wildland fires based on fuel conditions, climatic conditions, resources at risk, potential for damage to property or loss of life, both within and adjacent to the wilderness, as well as the availability of fire suppression resources.

If a wildland fire use program is implemented, planning documents will also include the prescriptions and procedures under which the program will be conducted within wilderness.

(See [Fire Management 4.5](#))

4.5 Fire Management (*general policy for all NPS lands*)

Naturally ignited fire, including the smoke it produces, is part of many of the natural systems that are being sustained in parks. Such natural systems contain plant and animal communities that are characterized as fire-adapted or fire-dependent. They require periodic episodes of fire to retain their ecological integrity and, in the human-caused absence of fire, they can experience undesirable impacts that diminish their integrity—such as unnatural successional trends, loss of habitat for fire-adapted plant and animal species, or vulnerability to unnaturally intense wildland fire. Other park natural systems are characterized by a natural absence or very low frequency of fire. These systems are at risk of losing their ecological integrity when the natural fire regime is subjected to human interference.

Fires that burn natural or landscaped vegetation in parks are called wildland fires. Wildland fires occur from both natural and human sources of ignition. Wildland fires may contribute to or hinder the achievement of park management objectives, and management response to each wildland fire is determined by whether or not the fire occurs within prescription as identified in the park's fire management plan. Wildland fire use is the application of an appropriate management response to naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined areas outlined in fire management plans. Prescribed fires are the deliberate ignition of fires under prescribed circumstances to accomplish resource management objectives in predefined areas outlined in approved fire management plans.

Fire management consists of a program of activities designed to meet management objectives for protection of resource values, life, and property and, where appropriate, for using naturally ignited and human-ignited wildland fires as management tools. Park fire management programs designed specifically to meet park resource management objectives—including allowing fire to perform its natural role as much as practicable—will ensure that firefighter and public safety are not compromised.

Parks with vegetation capable of burning will prepare a fire management plan that is consistent with federal law and departmental fire management policies, and that includes addressing the need for adequate funding and staffing to support the planned fire management program. The plan will be designed to guide a program that

- responds to the park's natural and cultural resource objectives;
- provides for safety considerations for park visitors, employees, and developed facilities;
- addresses potential impacts on public and private neighbors and their property adjacent to the park; and
- protects public health and safety.

The fire management plan will also include guidance on determining in which situations natural regeneration of a burned ecosystem is appropriate and when management actions are needed to restore, stabilize, or rehabilitate an area following wildland fire.

Environmental and cultural resource compliance documentation developed in support of the plan will consider the effects of fire on air quality, water quality, and human health and safety. It will also discuss the influence of fire, fire management, and the potential consequences and effects of fire exclusion on the ability of the park to meet its natural and cultural resource management objectives. Preparation of the plan and supporting documents will include collaboration with appropriate NPS natural and cultural resource offices, adjacent communities, interest groups, state and federal agencies, and tribal governments, with cooperating agency status granted when requested by eligible adjacent communities, state and federal agencies, and tribal governments.

All wildland fires will be effectively managed through application of the appropriate strategic and tactical management options as guided by the park's fire management plan. These options will be selected after comprehensive consideration of the resource values to be protected, firefighter and public safety, costs, availability of firefighting resources, weather, and fuel conditions. Naturally ignited and human-ignited fires managed to achieve resource management and fuel treatment objectives, and the smoke they produce, will both be managed to comply with applicable local, state, and federal air quality regulations. Such fires will also include monitoring programs that record fire behavior, smoke behavior, fire decisions, and fire effects to provide information on whether specific objectives are met and to improve future fire management strategies. All parks will use a systematic decision-making process identified in their fire management plans or other documents to determine the most appropriate management strategies for all unplanned ignitions and for any naturally or management-ignited fires that are no longer meeting resource management objectives.

Parks lacking an approved fire management plan may not use resource benefits as a consideration influencing the selection of a suppression strategy; they must consider the resource impacts of suppression alternatives in their decisions. Until a plan is approved, parks must immediately suppress all wildland fires, taking into consideration park resources and values to be protected, firefighter and public safety, costs, availability of firefighting resources, weather, and fuel conditions. Parks will use methods to suppress wildland fires that minimize the impacts of the suppression action and the fire and are commensurate with effective control, firefighter and public safety, and resource values to be protected.

Burnable vegetation in many parks includes areas that are hazardous to specific park resources or human safety and property because of the presence of fuels that could carry wildland fire into special resource protection zones, developed areas, or outside park boundaries. The fire management plan will address strategies for preventing the accumulation of hazardous fuels in specific areas and for eliminating hazardous conditions that may have developed over time due to past fire suppression programs or ongoing development activities. These strategies will entail strategic planning, interdisciplinary coordination, and interorganizational collaboration as needed to provide appropriate treatment using adaptive management practices that range from site specific to landscape level. Although prescribed fire remains the preferred and most widely used NPS tool for managing the accumulation of hazardous fuels, the strategies will incorporate other activities, such as manual, mechanical, biological and, rarely, chemical treatments (applying integrated pest management principles), that may be appropriate in specific instances, as guided by NPS and DOI policies and legal requirements.

More details on wildland fire management, including interagency and Department of the Interior policies and requirements, are contained in [Director's Order #18: Wildland Fire Management](#).

Fire management or suppression activities conducted within wilderness, including the categories of designated, recommended, potential, proposed, and eligible areas, will be consistent with the “minimum requirement” concept identified in [Chapter 6](#) and [Director’s Order #41: Wilderness Stewardship](#).

(See [General Management Concepts 4.1](#); [Partnerships 4.1.4](#); [Restoration of Natural Systems 4.1.5](#); [Air Resource Management 4.7](#); [Fire Detection, Suppression, and Post-fire Rehabilitation and Protection 5.3.1.2](#); [Fire Management 6.3.9](#); [Visitor Safety 8.2.5.1](#); [Structural Fire Protection and Suppression 9.1.8](#))