

Wilderness Minimum Requirements for Wildland Fire

Wildland fire activities are subject to the Minimum Requirements Analysis (MRA) process. Most fire management actions can be anticipated and their impact on the wilderness resources and character should be analyzed and approved in advance through the development of the Fire Management Plan (FMP) and associated EA or EIS.

The FMP should provide a determination as to whether various actions are necessary in wilderness (MRA Step 1). This would include the necessity for wildfire management and fuels management projects, including prescribed fire. (Figure 1.)

Wildfire Response

The FMP should specify typical methods and tools that may be used during the *initial response* to a wildfire. Different methods and tools that could be used under different initial response situations should be specified.

Example: Initial response to fires in a zone close to the wilderness boundary and that would threaten communities and homes may allow consideration of aggressive methods and tools. In contrast, an initial response deep in the wilderness having minimal risk to human life and safety and high potential for resource benefits may specify more limited and less impacting initial response methods and tools.

In the event that the park is managing a *long-duration wildfire* (one that will last for more than a few operational periods beyond the initial response) it is strongly recommended that long-term incident planning consider methods and tools that may differ from, and be less intrusive than, those used during the initial response. Subsequent planning cycles should reevaluate methods and tools as conditions and location of the fire activity change.

Important note: When human life and safety are under imminent threat, fire managers may apply any methods or tools necessary.

Prescribed Fire & Fuels Management Projects

NPS policy allows for the use of prescribed fire and fuels projects in wilderness to fulfill wilderness and other approved management objectives. However the use of these practices is not automatic. Each park, through their FMP, should include a determination of the general locations, conditions and frequency of the types of projects that are appropriate and identify the wilderness purposes these projects are intended to fulfill (MRA Step 1). Once the necessity is established, individual project plans are not required to revisit or further justify the necessity unless they fall outside the approved parameters established within the FMP.

A methods and tools analysis (MRA Step 2) for specific conditions and locations of fuels projects may be appropriate to develop within the FMP if there are a limited number of situations to consider. Ideally, the analysis could be applied to most, if not all, future projects. If a future project deviates from the analysis parameters, then a separate methods and tools analysis will be completed.

Example: The park intends to develop and maintain a 100' wide reduced fuel buffer along the wilderness boundary adjacent to an exterior housing development. The FMP has analyzed the project type and locations, and has received a determination that specifies the methods and tools that can be used for those types of projects. Those standards would be applied to all similar future projects. A separate methods and tools analysis would therefore not be required for each future project.

However, in many cases the specific conditions and locations of potential projects are unknown when the FMP is developed. In that case, each Prescribed Fire Plan or Mechanical Fuels Treatment Plan must analyze and gain approval for the methods and tools that will be used to implement the specific project.

Figure 1.

