

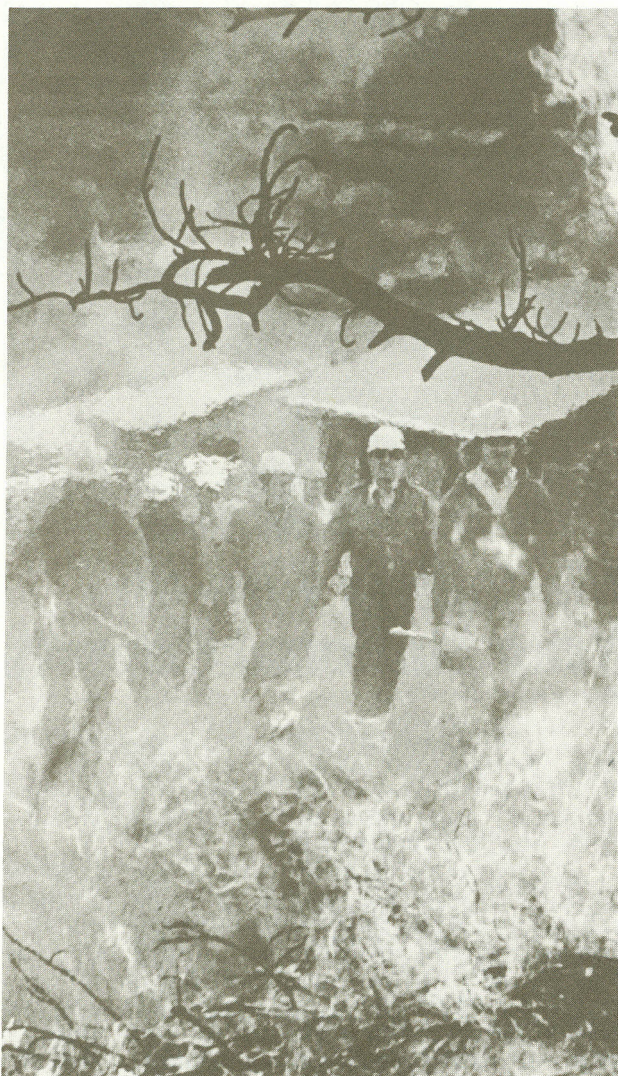


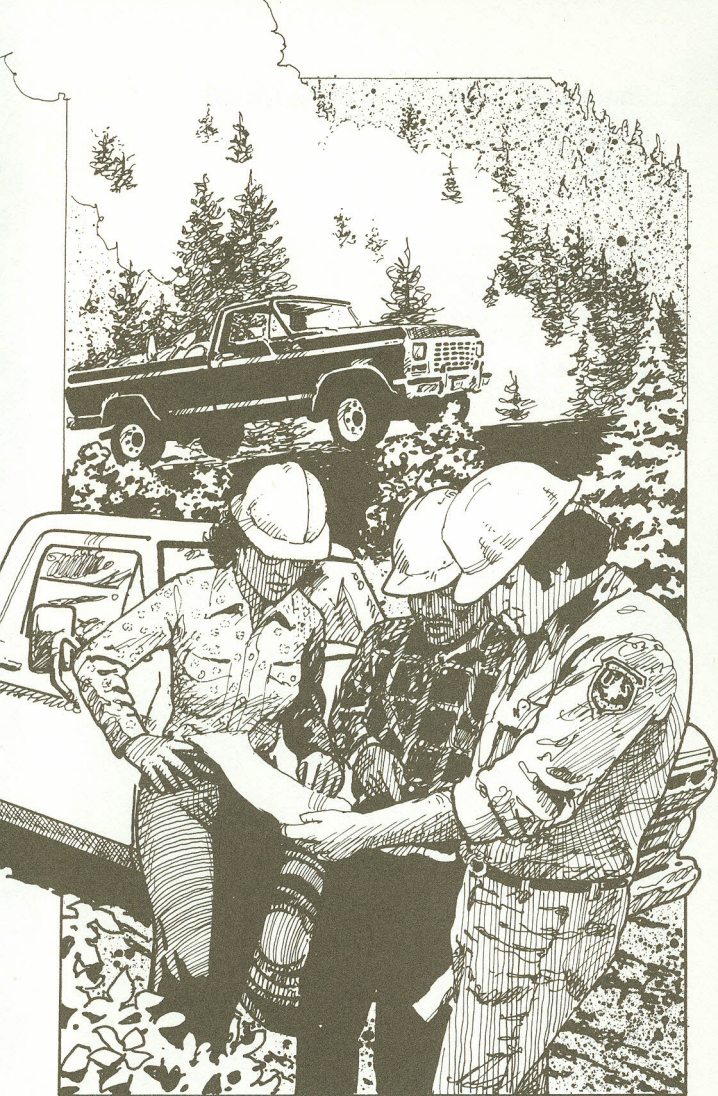
United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

FS-361

# Managing Fire on Your National Forests





# Managing Fire on Your National Forests

Everyone knows that a forest fire can be a destructive force. A runaway forest fire or wildfire can destroy the resources on thousands of acres of forest, endanger lives and property, cause erosion by stripping the land of its protective cover, and pollute the air.

But, fire can also be helpful if it is in the right place at the right time. Prescribed fires that remove logging slash or excess litter can help prevent larger wildfires. Prescribed fires can help some tree species grow faster by killing less desirable plants that are more susceptible to fire. Wildlife can also benefit from certain prescribed fires because food sources increase and movement becomes easier. When areas, such as wilderness areas, are managed to preserve



their natural characteristics, naturally occurring prescribed fires can help maintain that state.

So, National Forest managers have to be aware of both the beneficial and damaging effects of fire. Fire is an agent that modifies the resources of the forest—an agent that is good or bad depending on its effects. Managers make decisions about fire after taking into consideration how fire will affect the overall management plan for the forest.

## **Incorporating Fire Into Management Plans**

Just knowing that fire can be beneficial in certain cases is not enough to make fire a part of a land management program. National Forest managers must know how a particular fire will behave under existing and predicted weather conditions. And more importantly, they must know how each fire will affect the land, its resources, and the public.

Based on this knowledge, National Forest managers can develop a fire management program in accordance with the overall Forest Service fire policy. The policy insists that forest managers keep four things in mind when designing their program. The program must protect human life and property. It must insure that wildfires can be suppressed. It must help attain land management objectives. And, the benefits must justify the costs.

So fire management plans are based on Forest Service policy and the forest managers' special knowledge of the needs of their areas. The plans recognize two kinds of fires: wildfires and prescribed fires. Under the plans certain areas may be treated with prescribed fire for such purposes as reducing fire hazard, controlling insects and disease, and increasing browse for wildlife.

## **How Fire Management Works**

Let's look at what happens when an unplanned fire, such as a lightning fire, starts on the National Forest. In most cases, an unplanned fire is suppressed as quickly and as economically as possible. A prescribed fire can start from an unplanned ignition if the start occurs within an area with an approved plan. But even if there is an approved plan, the fire is suppressed unless the burning conditions and other factors are within the limits prescribed in the plan. Furthermore, the prescribed fire is not simply left alone to burn. The fire is carefully managed to insure that it meets management objectives. Management is continuous until the fire is extinguished, either naturally or through suppression efforts.

Occasionally, wildfires escape initial attack because burning conditions are so severe that the efforts of firefighters are not effective. When a fire escapes initial action, managers must decide what strategy to use against it. They make their decision based on the threat to life, property, and public safety; how much suppression actions will cost; and what the impact will be on the resources. The best strategy is chosen, and firefighters continue working until the fire is out.

## Fire Management for the 1980's

The strategy for managing fire on National Forest land in the 1980's will be tailored to the objectives of each area. Decisions will be based on how best to protect life, property, and resources, and to achieve the objectives of the land management plan. Certain principles will be followed:

1. Fire suppression will be fast, energetic, and thorough and conducted with a high degree of regard for personnel safety.
2. No fire will be simply left to burn. All wildfires will be suppressed. All prescribed fires will be managed by qualified Forest Service workers and in strict compliance with an approved plan.
3. Fire management objectives will be met at a reasonable cost.



March 1981