

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Branch of Wildland Fire
Division of Fire and Aviation



Wildland Fire Strategic Plan

2015 - 2019





Wildland Fire Program Mission

The National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Program manages wildland fire to protect the public; park communities and infrastructure; conserve natural and cultural resources; and maintain and restore natural ecosystem processes.

Wildland Fire Strategic Plan

2015 - 2019

National Park Service Branch of Wildland Fire
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Cover image: A firefighter
ignites the Falls prescribed
fire unit in Sequoia and Kings
Canyon National Parks. NPS / B.
ROSSO

Facing page: Fern Lake fire,
Rocky Mountain National Park,
December 2012. ©RYAN WHITE

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Purpose of the Wildland Fire Strategic Plan

Since its inception in 1916, the National Park Service (NPS) has been faced with periods of significant change. The dynamic physical, political and social environment requires the Wildland Fire Management Program to constantly evaluate how to best meet the needs of the NPS and what is possible to accomplish as circumstances evolve.

National Park Service Organic Act 1916

"[The National Park Service] shall promote and regulate the use of the Federal areas known as national parks, monuments, and reservations hereinafter specified . . . by such means and measures as conform to the fundamental purpose of the said parks, monuments, and reservations, 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." (16 U.S.C. §1)

Mission

The National Park Service preserves unimpaired the natural and cultural resources and values of the national park system for the enjoyment, education, and inspiration of this and future generations. The Park Service cooperates with partners to extend the benefits of natural and cultural resource conservation and outdoor recreation throughout this country and the world.

Although the mission of the NPS continues unchanged, some underlying conditions affecting how the wildland fire management program is managed will continue to shift. Part of this shift in wildland fire management is a response to the 2013 development of the intergovernmental "National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy" (Cohesive Strategy) and the NPS *A Call to Action*. This NPS Wildland Fire Strategic Plan incorporates the intent of the Cohesive Strategy as well as the goals of the NPS *A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement*.

The purpose of the NPS Wildland Fire Strategic Plan is to position the wildland fire management program, fire management staff at all levels of the organization, for the future by identifying trends, reaffirming our values and establishing our priorities for the next five years.

This plan reflects on the 2008-2012 Wildland Fire Management Strategic Plan and captures the changes in thinking about how NPS manages wildland fire through people, partnerships, and understanding of the changing ecological, social and economic environment in and around NPS lands. This plan describes what wildland fire management leadership considers the best course of action to meet the NPS mission, and how it can be effectively implemented. The NPS Fire Management Leadership Board (FMLB) provides leadership for the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program through strategic planning and coordination by providing consultation and expertise in wildland fire management to national, regional, and park management. FMLB is comprised of regional fire management officers and the Branch of Wildland Fire chief and program leads. They have developed this plan to aid the NPS in wildland fire management planning and execution.

A National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

Factors presenting the greatest challenges and the greatest opportunities for making a positive difference in addressing the wildland fire problems are:

- Restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes.

GOAL: Landscapes across all jurisdictions are resilient to fire-related disturbances in accordance with management objectives.

- Creating fire-adapted communities.

GOAL: Human populations and infrastructure can withstand a wildfire without loss of life and property.

- Responding to Wildfires.

GOAL: All jurisdictions participate in making and implementing safe, effective, efficient risk-based wildfire management decisions.



The Rim fire, which burned into Yosemite National Park in 2013, was the largest forest fire in California history to date. NPS

Accountability for the success of this plan resides with all individuals who implement the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program – national, regional and park fire management staff, NPS leadership and other who engage in wildland fire management. This plan should be used to support and inform leadership when making decisions.

This plan articulates the FMLB’s intent to enable regions and parks to make sound decisions based on safety and science. The plan provides a clear reference point for unity of national, regional, and park leadership, thus ensuring that our collective work is cohesive and efficient. The plan maps out a recommended course of action for the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program based on current and projected conditions. As conditions inevitably change, and as progress is made toward the goals, the FMLB will continually monitor, review, and update this plan as often as necessary to ensure it remains a trusted reference point. The intent is to guide, validate, and align project, staffing and budget decisions at all levels of the organization to meet our goals.

The strategic goals and objectives contained in this plan articulate our best judgment of where to spend time and attention to assure success. All levels of the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program will be involved in implementing the specific strategies to achieve the goals and objectives. Many components of this plan are multifaceted and complex requiring prioritization of goals and objectives. The commitment begins with the FMLB and is dependent upon a service-wide commitment from all involved in wildland fire management.

Trends and Predictions

The following trends are expected to affect the NPS wildland fire mission and program focus over the next five years.

- Life safety, protecting people, both the public and firefighters, in firefighting activities will remain the highest priority. This focus on safety remains the highest

A Call to Action – Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement

The Wildland Fire Management Program supports the theme: Preserving America’s Special Places.

GOALS: TO PRESERVE AMERICA’S SPECIAL PLACES IN THE NEXT CENTURY, THE NPS must:

MANAGE the natural and cultural resources of the National Park System to increase resilience in the face of climate change and other stressors.

CULTIVATE excellence in science and scholarship as a foundation for park planning, policy, decision making, and education.

ACHIEVE a standard of excellence in cultural and natural resource stewardship that serves as a model throughout the world.

COLLABORATE with other land managers and partners to create, restore, and maintain landscape-scale connectivity.

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- value in planning and conducting all wildland fire management actions.
- Tightening federal budgets will reduce staffing levels and force organizational adjustments. The NPS will carefully plan changes, while maintaining high standards for our key wildland fire program elements: Leadership; Program Administration; Planning and Compliance; Communication / Education; Logistics; Operations; Science and Evaluation; and Record and Data Management.
 - Climate change, following the current trend, will increase the demand for wildfire response and increase the complexities of managing ecosystems that evolve with fire. The job of understanding and managing the effects of these changes will be complex. Predicting future high-fire areas using climate models and implementing management actions in advance could help prevent damage or destruction of valued resources in those areas.
 - Organized incident management response needs will continue to increase for both wildland fire and non-wildland fire incidents. NPS has skills and responsibilities that transcend our agency and wildland fire management program, and NPS frequently depends on others to help achieve NPS goals.



C Triple S wildfire at Everglades National Park in 2014. NPS

- Environmental, economic, political and social conditions will continue to limit the ability to achieve ecological restoration and maintenance goals in many locations. There are many challenges in achieving our wildland fire management goals, some are budgetary but many are not. There will be an increase in the proportion of park landscapes where fire regimes have been significantly altered beyond the natural range of variability of the current landscape.
- Understanding, communicating, and taking effective action where NPS can make a positive difference in wildland fire outcome is our challenge. Wildfire will continue to shape much of the landscape, regardless of budget levels and socio-economic conditions. Many areas are likely to burn under wildfire conditions whether or not this is the preferred option.
- Funding for managing fuels from wildland fire appropriations will continue to fluctuate. NPS needs to apply our limited resources to priority areas and those treatments that can achieve multiple objectives. Funding from alternative sources for treatments aimed primarily at resource management objectives needs to expand.
- Wildland-urban interface (WUI) fire issues will continue to impact the work NPS accomplishes. Fire response and community preparedness will continue to drive funding toward the WUI resulting in less funding for ecological restoration efforts. Wildfire will remain an important tool in achieving resource management objectives.
- Invasive species will continue to alter ecosystems and affect management options. The knowledge and understanding of the interaction between invasive species and fire will lag behind management practices being used in the field.
- Public and political expectations for restoring and maintaining ecological landscapes are increasing in ways that are often inconsistent with current scientific knowledge. The ability to tell our story, and

setting realistic expectations both within the NPS and for our stakeholders, will fall short. Use of appropriate communication tools to disseminate these messages relevant to our publics is outpacing our abilities to generate them.

- Information and Technology will increasingly play a role in wildland fire management processes. The digital age presents opportunities for NPS to use technology to acquire, assess, process, analyze and disseminate information as part of a systems based approach to problem solving.

The Road Ahead

As the wildland fire management program moves forward into the second century of the NPS, along with other parts of the NPS, the wildland fire management program's future evolution will be focused on:

- Clarity of wildland fire mission requirements
- Strengthened adaptability and resilience of our culture to meet the challenges ahead

Know the True Mission Requirements

The wildland fire management program works to understand not only what is to be accomplished but also why it is done, and where it will take the NPS. Across the Service, wildland fire management program leaders and staff make decisions premised on the understanding of the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program mission:

The National Park Service Wildland Fire Management Program manages wildland fire to protect the public; park communities and infrastructure; conserve natural and cultural resources; and maintain and restore natural ecosystem processes.

The wildland fire management program has too often defined its mission objectives and priorities based upon budget availability, with an eye on continuing those actions already undertaken. It is likely that this lens has

inhibited us from seeing some of the changes that now have a real effect on capabilities and achievements. Determining what is needed to conduct the mission must be the primary driving force for all components of the work.

In addition, the environment in which the wildland fire management program works continues to become more complex and indeterminate. Politics, economics, changing societal values toward public lands, long-term climate projections, air quality, ecological concerns, and a host of other factors, increasingly influence how NPS lands are managed. Many of these factors inhibit the use of traditional methods of land management. Many of them press the very definition of what it means to be a good steward. The resulting complexity requires flexible decision-making that relies on judgment and accountability.

Clarifying and Communicating Intent

This strategic plan is, at its core, about the long-term sustainability and success of the NPS Wildland Fire Management program. With this clear leader's intent, "the desired outcome" for a program, project or action is understood, allowing the delegated leaders to carry out the program by making the right decisions with the end state in mind. This plan will help to build stronger connections among national, regional, and park fire management, and with NPS leadership. Stronger connections will entail strengthening relationships and consistent communications. It requires leaders to provide clear direction, to delegate and to entrust decision-making to the lowest practical levels. We will maximize efficiencies, reassess what is feasible to accomplish, prioritize, and at times say no to doing more with less. This necessarily requires holding ourselves accountable to understand and deliver an accurate picture of our mission, the intent of our actions, and our values.

Wildland Fire Management Values

Values are the bond which hold organizations and teams together and serve as a fixed reference when making difficult decisions. The NPS is viewed worldwide as a leader in the area of natural resource stewardship. The

NPS Wildland Fire Management Program exemplifies this leadership through a culture which empowers leaders at all levels to take action and adapt to accomplish the agencies mission. We need to continue and strengthen these positive characteristics, and at the same time, be flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities when they arise and make the best of setbacks.

This type of culture - dedicated to service, teamwork and mission - is founded on the following values:

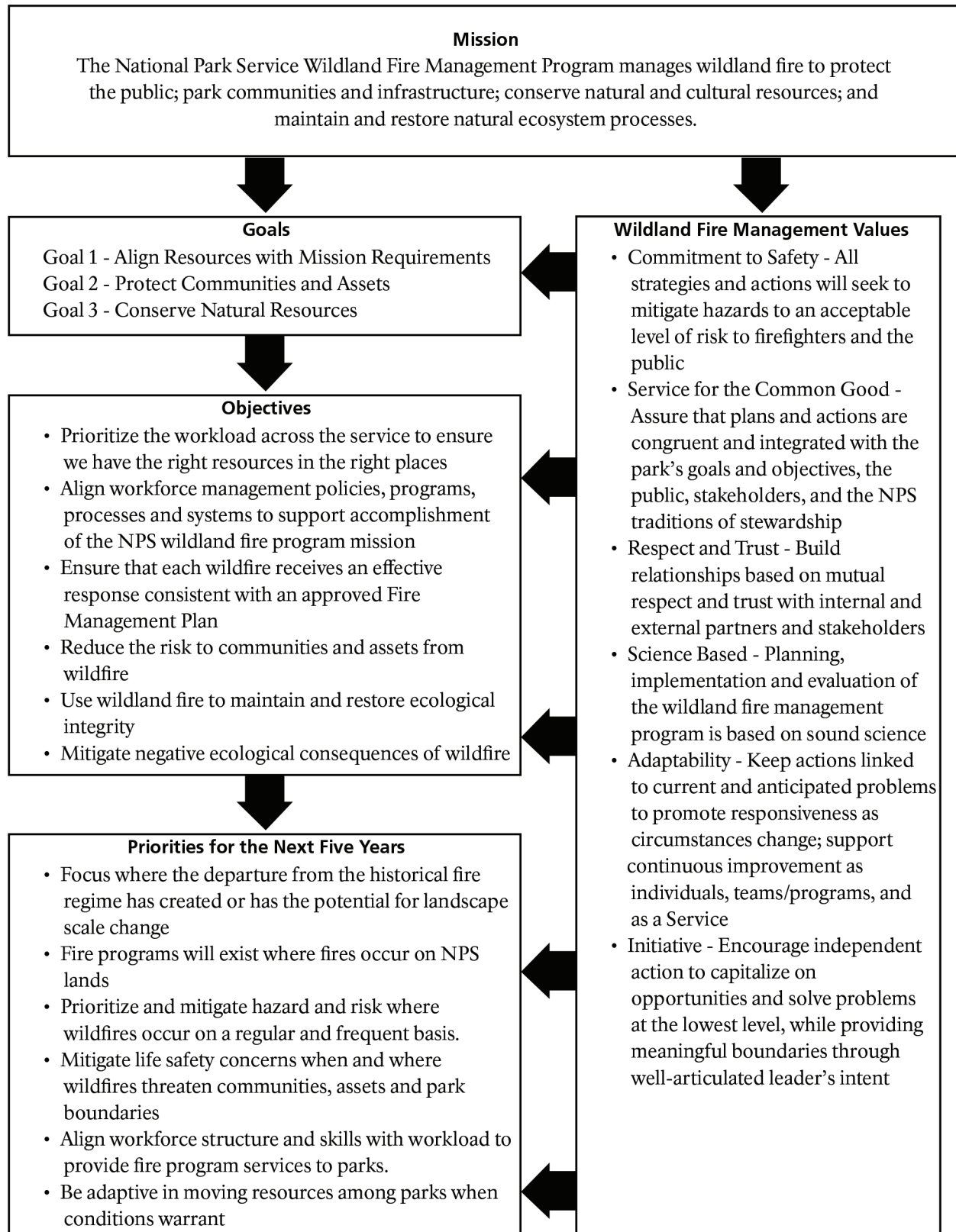
- **Commitment to Safety** - No natural or cultural resource, home, or item of property is worth a human life. All strategies and actions will seek to mitigate hazards to an acceptable level of risk to firefighters and the public.
- **Service for the Common Good** - Beyond public safety, assure that plans and actions are congruent and integrated with the park's goals and objectives, the public, stakeholders, and the NPS traditions of stewardship. The wildland fire management program exercises judicious, cost-effective use of appropriated funds and resources.
- **Respect and Trust** - The wildland fire management program builds relationships with internal and external partners and stakeholders. These relationships are based on mutual respect and trust so that they are authentic and durable, and problem-solving will be open to constructive debate and collaborative decisions.
- **Science Based** - Our planning, implementation and evaluation of the wildland fire management program is predicated on sound science that adds to a common, accurate, and clearer understanding of our current situation and future challenges.
- **Adaptability** - Keep actions linked to current and anticipated problems to promote responsiveness as circumstances change; support continuous improvement as individuals, teams/programs, and as a Service. The wildland fire management program fosters frank and open discussion



An interpreter discusses the Myrtle fire with a visitor at Wind Cave National Park. NPS / T. FARRELL

- of operational performance. Leadership is provided, developed, and encouraged.
- Initiative - Encourage independent action to take advantage of opportunities and solve problems at the lowest level, while providing meaningful boundaries through well-articulated leader's intent.

Setting Wildland Fire Management Program Priorities for the Next Five Years





Ozark National Scenic Riverways has used prescribed fire to benefit glade and woodland habitats. As a result, the park has seen an increase in wildflower species such as tall larkspur (*Delphinium exaltatum*), grass pink orchid (*Calopogon tuberosus*), and Riddell's goldenrod (*Solidago riddellii*). NPS

Priorities

Goals are expressed in priority order. In order to be successful in national resource conservation efforts the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program first has to ensure protection of park infrastructure, communities and sensitive park resources. To meet these two goals, organizationally the wildland fire management program must align its resources focusing on areas that are at the greatest risk from wildfire and where we can effect long-term, positive changes across the landscape.

This prioritization ensures alignment of social/political context with environmental context within fiscal constraints. Focus will be in parks where the historic fire regime has created the potential for landscape-scale changes and where life safety issues are prominent considerations. The wildland fire management program will use a representative set of data and analysis of historic fire activities in parks, in combination with data indicating when and where wildfires have threatened communities, assets and park boundaries, to define priorities. It is essential to form a common understanding of differences between potential (defined by WUI, adverse fuel conditions, etc.), and threat (probability or likelihood of occurrence) for wildfire in a given location in order to make effective decisions on priorities.

Goals, Objectives & Strategies

The management of wildland fire is a fundamental means to accomplish the NPS mission. The first Goal will position the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program organizationally to help us be successful with Goals 2 and 3. Goal 2 and Goal 3 will protect the infrastructure necessary to provide for visitor enjoyment, education and inspiration and enable the wildland fire management program to conserve natural and cultural resources now and in the future. To meet the goals, the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program will work with all NPS divisions, adjacent communities, and inter-governmental partners.

Goal 1 – Align Wildland Fire Management Resources with Mission Requirements

The NPS Wildland Fire Management Program is an integral part of accomplishing the NPS mission. It is these mission requirements that set the frame for the allocation of resources and management strategies across the wildland fire management program.

Objective 1:

1. Prioritize the NPS Wildland Fire Management workload across the service to ensure we have the right resources in the right places to meet the mission.

Focusing on the core mission of the NPS we must engage and collaborate at all levels and across disciplines within the Service to accomplish the work that is most important to meet current and emerging issues. This will require clear understanding and support from leadership.

Strategies:

- a. Establish service-wide wildland fire management priorities that are reflective of the level of risk to values and are expressed in terms that are measurable
- b. Build flexibility into the Wildland Fire Management organization that allows for a proactive response to changing budget levels and ensures our funding allocations are defensible and measurable
- c. Allocate resources across the NPS to meet wildland fire management priorities commensurate with the level of risk to values
- d. Actively engage NPS leadership to ensure a common understanding of the long-term direction of the NPS wildland fire management program

Objective 2:

2. Align workforce management policies, programs, processes and systems to support accomplishment of the NPS wildland fire program mission

Fiscal investments and human workforce must be aligned and structured to accomplish the wildland fire program mission. We must allocate resources to reflect a strong organizational commitment to employee development and redirect existing workforce skills and develop new workforce strengths.

Strategies:

- a. Establish a national workforce development and management plan to ensure effective succession and the long-term viability of the wildland fire management program
- b. Enhance the core elements of leadership, science and ecology, planning, operational response, and communication and education
- c. Recruit, hire, develop, and retain a diverse workforce with the competencies necessary to accomplish the wildland fire program mission
- d. Establish a central data store to manage and track wildland fire management resources

Goal 2 - Protect Communities and Assets

Protect life, communities and assets from adverse effects of wildland fire without compromising safety through robust preparedness and response programs. We begin this work with internal and external agency relationships, adequately assessing wildland fire potential and risk to values, and making sound decisions.

Objective 1:

1. Ensure that each wildfire receives an effective response consistent with the approved fire management plan, based on ecological, social, and legal consequences of the fire.

The conditions and circumstances under which a fire occurs, the likely consequences to firefighter and public safety, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected, all dictate the response and management strategy for the fire. The process will provide situational assessment, hazard and risk analysis, outline actions, and document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

Strategies:

- a. Identify priority parks that are at risk to wildfire and assess whether their current FMPs allow for the use of wildfire to meet resource objectives, values-to-be-protected are identified, and whether wildfire hazard and risk mitigation priorities are identified and in-place

- b. Ensure all Fire Management Planning documents meet current planning guidance, are up to date and are accessible across the NPS
- c. Ensure leadership understands the wildland fire management risk management decision process, their role, and that a decision support process is used to guide and document all wildfire management decisions

Objective 2:

2. Reduce the risk to communities and assets, including park infrastructure and sensitive resources, from wildfire.

The wildland fire management program collaborates with NPS structural fire, facilities, and design programs to formulate a strategy to identify, assess, and mitigate hazards to all NPS assets that could be impacted by wildland fire, and work actively to reduce the risk of human-caused ignition.

Strategies:

- a. Use spatial planning tools to clearly demonstrate the resources that the NPS is trying to protect and the potential risk
- b. Identify parks where human-caused fires are a significant workload and are likely to result in costly and damaging fires and develop mitigation actions
- c. Develop a program of work to address priority parks wildfire risk mitigation needs for communities and assets
- d. Develop metrics and reporting protocols to measure the level of risk reduction to communities and assets and hold programs accountable

Goal 3 - Conserve Natural Resources:

Conserve natural resources to provide sustainable environmental and social benefits.

Objective 1:

1. Use wildland fire to maintain and restore ecological integrity where possible, or to facilitate adaptation to changing environmental conditions.

Wildland fire management program managers will collaborate with other

resource professionals, park leadership, and our partners to identify priority areas to use prescribed fire, non-fire treatments or wildfire to meet ecological objectives.

Strategies:

- a. Define the priority areas within the NPS that can be effectively and feasibly treated with wildland fire management activities
- b. Develop a program of work, including funding, implementation, and maintenance needs to address priority areas
- c. Determine effectiveness of treatments to maintain or meet ecological objectives based on DOI, NPS and wildland fire management goals

Objective 2:

2. Mitigate negative ecological consequences of wildfire.

The wildland fire management program will identify those areas where negative ecological consequences from wildfire, in terms of extent, frequency, severity or seasonality, are outside the levels needed to maintain a resilient landscape and what the consequences are of failing to take action.

Strategies:

- a. Define the priority areas where fire regime and intensity is outside of an acceptable range with healthy and resilient landscape expectations
- b. Identify areas where strategic fuels treatments are needed to break up landscapes to meet resilient landscape expectations
- c. Develop a program of work to implement treatments in priority areas to enhance the ability to use wildfire on these landscapes.
- d. Analyze, using science based protocols, the effectiveness of treatments to maintain or meet ecological objectives based on DOI, NPS and wildland fire management goals.

These wildland fire goals directly impact how the wildland fire management program plans, responds, and manages wildland fire. In addition, they establish the framework for effectively planning an efficient organization comprised of a well-trained and well-positioned workforce, and how to make the best use of appropriated funds.

Wildland Fire Program Management Roles and Responsibilities

National Level

The NPS Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation, is responsible for the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program leadership and management at the national level under the guidance of the Associate Director for Visitor and Resource Protection. The NPS Branch of Wildland Fire, located at the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), Boise, Idaho, establishes priorities and funding allocations to the regions and parks, national intra and interagency coordination of wildland fire policy development, reviews, and service-wide program standards and practices for implementation of the NPS Wildland Fire Management Program.

Regional Level

NPS regional fire management officers are responsible for NPS Wildland Fire Program leadership, coordination, and management within their regions under the guidance of regional leadership. The regional fire management officers will provide training, oversight, and information to parks within their region and coordinate activities with other regions, agencies, tribes, and states as necessary and prudent for the program. They are also responsible for supporting, managing, and conducting reviews and evaluation of wildland fire activities. The regional fire management officers will involve other program areas such as law enforcement, budget, wilderness, cultural and natural resources, and public affairs, as necessary and appropriate, to ensure an integrated interagency and interdisciplinary program.

Park Level

NPS park fire management officers or designated fire coordinators are responsible for developing, implementing and evaluating wildland fire management activities within their parks under the guidance of the superintendent or their delegate. The park fire management officer with engagement from appropriate park leadership will coordinate with interagency partners, local fire departments and nearby parks to ensure

agreements, memorandum of understanding and annual operating plans are in place. The park fire management officer in coordination with park leadership will engage other

program areas to ensure park employees are trained, qualified and available to participate in wildland fire management activities as the situation demands.

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Firefighters ignite the Riniker Hayfields prescribed fire at Grand Teton National Park in 2014. FWS / L. IVERSON

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