



Wildland Fire Key Messages

The National Park Service responds to and manages every fire on NPS land.

- While the response may differ from fire to fire, the NPS responds to all wildfires that occur within park boundaries and assists in firefighting efforts for our partner agencies.
- NPS fire staff are prepared to respond to every wildfire and are well-positioned to make informed decisions to manage each fire.
- We are committed to using the best fire management strategies and all tools in our toolbox to protect people, parks, and surrounding communities.

The National Park Service is committed to safety, science, and stewardship every day.

- **Safety is our core value.**
 1. The mental and physical safety of firefighters and the public is the number one priority of all NPS wildland fire management activities.
 2. Our goal is to ensure not only physical safety, but to provide mental health support for all wildland fire personnel, both on and off the fireline.
 3. We work to keep firefighters safe by limiting exposure to risks on the fireline, providing effective and accessible resources, and investing in wildfire prevention, including reducing hazardous accumulation of overgrown vegetation that could lead to larger and more complex wildfires.
 4. NPS wildland fire personnel and support staff are encouraged to use mental health resources provided by the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) Mental Health Subcommittee, NPS employee support services, and the Wildland Fire Lessons Learned Center (LLC).
 5. The LLC provides resources for peer-to-peer conversation around health and safety including mental health.
 6. NPS personnel follow safety guidelines from federal health and safety agencies to prevent the spread of communicable diseases or illness. Federal wildland firefighters and emergency responders follow guidance from the NWCG Risk Management Committee and adhere to safety protocols during incident response.
- The NPS works with interagency partners and neighboring communities to preserve natural and cultural resources, restore the land, and maintain already healthy ecosystems.
 1. Fire managers balance the risks and benefits of wildland fire in national parks and use fires as a tool to protect people, communities, property, and natural and cultural resources.

2. Changing environmental conditions and increasing numbers of large fires require more flexibility and use of a wider variety of responses.
 3. NPS scientists work in partnership with other professionals and agencies to achieve restoration and recovery goals during Burned Area Rehabilitation (BAR) or Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) projects. Post-fire recovery may include natural recovery, immediate emergency stabilization, or long-term stabilization and recovery actions.
- Fire is a management tool used to accomplish specific objectives such as removing excess vegetation or stimulating plant growth and regeneration.
 1. It is necessary to have the right response at the right time for the right reasons.
 2. Every wildfire is evaluated and receives a response – from aggressive suppression to close monitoring. Fire managers may use a variety of approaches to manage and respond to a single fire based on the fire management plan for the area.
 3. 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.”
 4. Effective landscape management may include non-fire treatments, such as cutting and removing grass, shrubs or trees, in situations where prescribed fire is not feasible or to prepare the land for prescribed fire to be applied safely and effectively.

We aggressively suppress wildfires that pose a threat to life, property, and/or safety.

- While fire is part of a healthy natural ecosystem, we aggressively suppress wildfires that threaten people, property, infrastructure, or key natural and historic features both inside and outside parks. In fact, NPS aggressively suppresses 90% of all wildfires on national park lands for this reason, while others are managed using [other tactics](#).
 1. While suppression is a top priority, it is not always the best choice for every situation. Suppressing all wildfires results in fuel buildup which can eventually make wildfires more severe than they otherwise would have been.

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2. Fires may be monitored when they don't pose a risk to human life or structures and would have positive effects on natural areas.
3. Wildland firefighting has inherent risk. When determining the best approach to managing a wildfire, managers prioritize safety of people as they weigh the risks of specific firefighting tactics.
4. NPS fire managers evaluate and respond to every wildfire in a way that balances wildland firefighter safety and people, park resources, and surrounding communities.
5. We regularly work with other agencies to fight wildfires outside of parks.

Many healthy ecosystems depend on wildland fire as a natural process.

- Virtually all vegetation types in the United States can experience wildland fire.
- Fire has helped shape landscapes for thousands of years and is important for the survival of many plants and animals.
 1. Fire reduces accumulation of vegetation that can inhibit new plant growth.
 2. Many healthy ecosystems depend on wildland fire as a natural process. In many cases, periodic fire stimulates growth, reproduction of plants, and provides wildlife habitat.
 3. Excess vegetation unchecked by periodic fires in some areas is threatening plant and animal life.
- Every wildfire is different, and many factors and considerations go into the decision-making process for managing each wildfire. Depending on fuels, terrain, weather, and risk for firefighters, fire managers may implement a combination of strategies to manage the wildfire.
 1. Every wildfire season is different due to annual and/ or seasonal variations, as well as local conditions.
 2. Fire behavior is affected by weather, terrain, and the types and density of vegetation in the area.

Science tells the story: wildfire seasons are changing because of recent, rapid changes in climate.

- Climate change is bringing extreme warm temperatures to most parks compared to historical conditions, with implications for parks like Glacier National Park and Denali National Park (loss of snow and ice); and parks in the Southwest as well.

1. Climate change is exacerbating conditions conducive to large wildfires, with implications for places like Rocky Mountain National Park, Lassen Volcanic National Park, Mojave National Preserve, and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area (all burned significantly in recent years).
 2. Climate change is affecting wildfire probability, frequency, and seasonal duration.
 3. Parks vulnerable to drought and insect infestation due to climate change may also see higher occurrence of wildfire incidents with destructive potential.
- Wildfires have serious implications for regional air and water quality, visitor access and safety, and the protection of natural and cultural resources.
 - Management strategies for wildland fire over the past century have focused on preventing and suppressing the majority of wildfires. This has led to a dangerous build-up of vegetation in our wildlands.
 - NPS wildland fire management is grounded in science. We continue to learn and now have a more comprehensive understanding of the essential role fire plays in our environment.
 - When paired with the right terrain, extreme weather conditions exacerbated by climate change is leading to wildfires that burn hotter, last longer, and spread faster. These wildfires become difficult to manage and can threaten residential development and other vulnerable infrastructure.

NPS staff work to not only protect people and park resources from fires, but also prevent wildfires.

- Through fire preparedness programs and resources, NPS staff educate communities about how to reduce the risk of wildfire on their properties, how to recreate responsibly, and what to do should a wildfire occur.
 1. Every visitor has a role to help prevent human-caused wildfires in national parks.
 2. Visitors should be aware of park fire safety guidance and restrictions.
 3. Park staff work to protect people and park resources from fires, as well as structures and facilities. Park staff collaborate with local interagency fire prevention staff to share consistent fire prevention messages to local communities and park visitors.
 4. Homeowners and communities play a large role in fire prevention.

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The National Park Service works with neighbors and partners to balance the risks and benefits of wildland fire in an ever-changing environment.

- The NPS works with other agencies, Tribes, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local fire departments, and communities near parks to develop and implement fire management plans.
 1. The NPS works with other agencies and Tribes to manage and respond to fires under an interagency plan called the Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.
 2. The NPS works with other agencies, Tribes, local governments, and property owners to make property more defensible against wildfire.
 3. The NPS considers and includes Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in fire management in conjunction with Tribes where appropriate.
- People can safely coexist with fire, if aware of the potential risks and actions are taken to be prepared for local fire conditions.
 1. Be sure to 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 prevent fires.
 2. 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.
 1. During prescribed fires, fire managers work to mitigate impacts of smoke.
- The more the NPS and other land management agencies can plan and manage fire, the more we can reduce smoke impacts.
 1. Breathing smoke is not healthy for anyone, but [there are ways](#) park residents and neighbors can reduce their exposure to smoke.
 2. The NPS Air Resources Division [provides information about smoke and air quality](#) to inform fire management decisions and help communities prepare for air quality impacts.
- Fire burns where and when conditions are right. So, the NPS works closely with other agencies, Tribes, and our communities to protect people and park resources from catastrophic fires.



Prescribed fire in Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve. NPS/M JOHNSON