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## Fire Use

### **What is Using Wildland Fire for Resource Benefits?**

Wildland Fire Use is the management of naturally-ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific pre-stated resource management objectives in predefined geographic areas. The goal of managing fires for resource benefits is to allow fire to function in its natural role in the ecosystem. Historically, natural fires created a mosaic of different vegetative types. In turn, these vegetative patterns created a diversity of habitats.

Fire cycles nutrients back into the soil and helps regulate insect and disease levels in many plants. All these benefits are essential for a healthy ecosystem. Managing fires for resource benefits can also reduce heavy fuel accumulations (litter, branches, fallen trees, etc.) caused by years of fire suppression. This significantly reduces the potential for large intense fire in the future.

#### **Isn't this just a new "let it burn" policy?**

No. We don't just "let it burn." Naturally-ignited fires are managed to accomplish specific resource management objectives within predefined geographic areas. Fire planners must assess risk, predict fire behavior and growth, plan for contingencies, determine the maximum limits of the fire area, called maximum manageable areas (MMA), and define management action points that signal the need to implement actions which mitigate or eliminate threats to personnel, public safety and the MMA.

Fire managers may use a full range of mitigation actions to remove people from harm's way or delay, direct or check the spread of fire to protect private property, and keep fire within MMA's. These actions could range from specific site closures to on-the-ground actions, such as fire line construction, helicopter bucket and air tanker retardant drops, and burnouts.

All mitigation actions, however, are based on safety, environmental considerations, and minimizing long-term impacts to the land.

### **What goes into making the decision to manage a fire for resource benefits?**

First, there must be an approved Fire Management Plan (FMP) that provides objectives for fire management. Without an approved FMP, there is no other option than suppression. Wildland fires with approved FMP's give fire managers the option to implement an appropriate management response. It is important to note that appropriate management response is not a replacement for prescribed natural fire, but includes the full range of appropriate strategies. The appropriate management response is based on objectives, environmental and fuel conditions, constraints, safety, and ability to accomplish objectives.

When fire managers determine to manage a natural ignition for resource benefits, a three stage process called a *Wildland Fire Implementation Plan* is prepared. The three stages of this plan include:

**Stage I - Initial Fire Assessment:** This stage consists of documenting the fire situation and initial "go/no-go" decision. It helps fire managers in making the initial decision to manage fire for resource benefits or to suppress by providing location of the fire (Fire Management Plan suppression or fire use unit), cause of the fire (human or natural) and validation of fire use decision ("Go/No-Go" decision).

**Stage II - Short Term Assessment and Implementation Actions:** This stage represents the initial stage of managing fires for resource benefits based on desired effects and objectives. It provides fire managers with predictions of where the fire may go, how intense it may burn, how fast it may spread, what the necessary short-term

management actions are, what the full complexity is, and if long-term management actions need to be addressed.

### **Stage III - Long-Term Assessment and Implementation**

**Actions:** This stage typically supplements the FMP by providing long-term implementation actions necessary to manage the fire to accomplish identified objectives. A risk assessment is completed which will help determine the ultimate acceptable geographic area that the fire will be managed within (Maximum Manageable Area or MMA). It considers the long-term fire behavior predictions, and long-term risk assessment. It also assesses the likelihood of the fire reaching the MMA perimeter, and documents those operational management actions necessary to manage long duration fires that will need mitigation measures to strengthen and defend the MMA and protect life, property, and sensitive natural and cultural resources.

### **What about the smoke?**

Fire managers must carefully coordinate with State and County agencies responsible for smoke management. Fuel consumption and the emissions produced, trajectory and dispersion can be estimated using computer models. Like forecasting weather, smoke management is not an exact science. If air quality levels deteriorate to a point specified by law or other guidelines, fire managers may decide to take appropriate management actions.