

1. FOUNDATION OF THE FMP

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Agencies within the Department of Interior with vegetation capable of sustaining wildland fire are required to prepare FMPs that conform to federal wildland fire management policy and meet all federal regulatory requirements. The NPS recognized and acted on this policy direction.

The PRNS FMP is based on the implementation strategy selected by the NPS Pacific West Regional Director at the conclusion of a multi-year EIS process involving public and regulatory agency consultations. The Record of Decision (ROD) is Appendix C to this FMP; the Mitigation Measures adopted through the ROD are Appendix D. Together these documents record the analyses conducted on the selected strategy, mitigation measures developed to reduce or avoid potential impacts from implementing that strategy and the findings, decisions and commitments made by the Regional Director in signing the ROD on October 29, 2004.

The FMP provides a framework for all fire management activities and the management of wildland fire and prescribed fire as a tool to safely accomplish protection and resource management objectives on NPS lands. NPS lands in PRNS consisting of 71,046 acres of Point Reyes National Seashore and the northern lands of GGNRA (19,265 acres) are addressed by this FMP. The northern lands of GGNRA lands are on Bolinas Ridge, directly east of the Point Reyes peninsula and are managed by PRNS through an agreement with GGNRA.

1.2 RELATIONSHIP TO LAND MANAGEMENT PLANNING AND FIRE POLICY

NPS fire management actions must conform to adopted plans and policies of the Department of the Interior and the National Park Service. These include the Federal Wildland Management Policy, NPS Management Policies, Director's Order #18 and Reference Manual #18 (2005), the guidance documents for wildland fire management in the NPS, as well as the General Management Plan and resource management plans for PRNS and GGNRA.

1.2.1 Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (2001)

In 2001, the Interagency Federal Wildland Fire Policy Review Working Group revised and updated the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy (NIFC 2001), which applies to all federal land management agencies. The key element of the policy is that firefighter and public safety is the first priority. In addition, the policy states that fire, as a critical natural process, will be integrated into land and resource management plans and activities on a landscape scale, and across agency boundaries. The policy also directs that fire management plans and programs will be based on a foundation of sound science. Research will support ongoing efforts to increase our scientific knowledge of biological, physical, and sociological factors.

1.2.2 National Park Service Management Policies (2000)

NPS Management Policies (NPS 2000) is the agency-wide policy document for the NPS. Management policies for wildland fire management and more specific guidance on implementation are found in Director's Order 18 and the companion document Reference

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Manual 18. These documents provide detailed guidance to NPS staff in the development of Fire Management Plans and other companion plans, such as monitoring plans.

Management Policies, Section 4.5, Fire Management

Regarding Fire Management Plans: “Each park with vegetation capable of burning will prepare a fire management plan and will address the need for adequate funding and staffing to support its fire management program. The plan will be designed to guide a program that responds to the park’s natural and cultural resource objectives; provides for safety considerations for park visitors, employees, neighbors, and developed facilities; and addresses potential impacts to public and private property adjacent to the park. Preparation of the plan and environmental assessment will include collaboration with adjacent communities, interest groups, state and federal agencies, and tribal governments.”

Regarding Overall Strategy: “All fires burning in natural or landscaped vegetation in parks will be classified as either wildland fires or prescribed fires. All wildland fires will be effectively managed through application of the appropriate strategic and tactical management options. These options will be selected after comprehensive consideration of the resource values to be protected, firefighter and public safety, and costs.”

Regarding Wildland Fire Suppression: “Parks will use methods to suppress wildland fires that minimize impacts of the suppression action and the fire, and are commensurate with effective control, firefighter and public safety, and resource values to be protected.”

Regarding Fire Management in Wilderness: “Suppression activities conducted within wilderness, including the categories of designated, recommended, potential, proposed, and study areas, will be consistent with the ‘minimum requirement’ concept identified in Director’s Order #41: Wilderness Preservation and Management.”

1.2.3 Director’s Order #18, Wildland Fire Management (2005)

Director’s Order #18, Section 5(2)(a), builds on the requirement from the Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and reiterated in the NPS Management Policies that, “Every park area with burnable vegetation must have a fire management plan approved by the Superintendent.”

Director’s Order #18 specifically addresses the direction and content expected in the FMPs prepared for NPS units. The FMPs will:

1. Reinforce the commitment that firefighter and public safety is the first priority.
2. Describe wildland fire management objectives that are derived from land, natural, and cultural resource management plans and address public health issues and values to be protected.
3. Address all potential wildland fire occurrences and consider the full range of wildland fire management actions.
4. Promote an interagency approach to managing fires on an ecosystem basis across agency boundaries and in conformance with the natural ecological processes and conditions characteristic of the ecosystem.

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5. Include a description of rehabilitation techniques and standards that comply with resource management plan objectives and mitigate immediate safety threats.
6. Be developed with internal and external interdisciplinary input and reviewed by appropriate subject matter experts and all pertinent interested parties, and approved by the park superintendent.
7. Comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and any other applicable regulatory requirements.
8. Include a wildland fire prevention analysis and plan.
9. Include a fuels management analysis and plan.
10. Include procedures for short and long term monitoring to document that overall programmatic objectives are being met and undesired effects are not occurring.

1.2.4 PRNS and GGNRA General Management Plan (NPS 1980)

In 1980, the two parks collaborated on a joint planning and NEPA process that produced a joint plan and Environmental Assessment. In addressing fire management strategy, the General Management Plan recognized the need to incorporate prescribed burning into research programs designed to improve and inform ecosystem management in the park. The Plan states: “Although the majority of the seashore is generally viewed as a wild area where natural processes are allowed to predominate, manipulation of those processes through methods such as selective thinning, burning and mowing will be cautiously pursued when necessary to protect its scenic, ecological and recreational values (NPS, 1980).” Both parks are in the midst of public processes to update their respective General Management Plans.

