



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Bryce Canyon National Park

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Bryce Canyon National Park Fire Management

Fire Use Fires are naturally ignited wildland fires managed to accomplish pre-stated resource management objectives in predefined geographical areas as outlined in Fire Management Plans. They are also known as fires for resource benefits.



Bryce Canyon Manages First Large Wildland Fire Use Fire

Bryce Canyon National Park just successfully completed managing their first major wildland fire use fire (WFU). This comes on the heels of their recently completed Interagency Fire Management Plan, with the Dixie National Forest, which now allows naturally ignited fires to be managed for resource benefits rather than being immediately suppressed as in the past. This management option now gives the park the opportunity to restore fire to its natural role in the ecosystem whenever safely possible.

The Swamp WFU is located along the main park road, near Swamp Canyon Overlook, at an elevation of 8,200 feet. It was ignited by lightning on June 25 and grew to 165 acres over a period of two weeks. Some torching of trees and spotting occurred, but most of the fire activity was limited to burning of ground fuels. Fire crews completed containment lines around the perimeter of the fire to keep it from expanding.

A National Park Service Fire Use Manager was brought in on July 1 to oversee the management of the fire along with a crew of firefighters to assist local park resources. The management of the fire was transferred back to Bryce Canyon personnel on July 8.

One of the unique aspects of this fire was the fact that throughout the rest of the Color Country Fire Management Area there were numerous wildland fires burning during the same time period that were being managed under a suppression strategy by Incident Management Teams. Even with the high fire danger and preparedness levels in the lower elevations of Color Country, the Swamp Fire was able to be successfully managed for resource benefits. This is a good example of how fires in the same general area can be managed using different options depending upon each fire's characteristics.

The Swamp WFU has accomplished many of the goals that Bryce Canyon fire and resource managers were looking for, including reducing the fuel loading and thinning out the thick stands of mixed conifers in the area, many of which were dead from bug kill. This will allow for the penetration of more sunlight to the forest floor and thus create a more diverse plant community. The area of the burn is not solid black, but a patchwork of varying degrees of fire intensity, with some areas remaining green. The thinning of the forest in the burn area will additionally benefit visitors by allowing them to have a better view of the canyon rim from the park road.

Occasionally, smoke from the fire crossed the park road, but it never forced its closure or that of any of the trails in the area. Signs were put along the roadway to warn visitors of the fire and smoke. An information station was established in a turnout near the fire and staffed by park interpreters to inform visitors of the fire's status. A few of the local community leaders were taken to the fire area by park staff where they could safely learn about Bryce Canyon's new fire management option. At no time did the fire pose any threat to park resources.

The option to allow some naturally ignited wildland fires to provide resource benefits instead of suppressing them will give Bryce Canyon fire management personnel another tool to use in their goal to restore fire to the park. It will also help perpetuate the values for which the park was established.

