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**National Park Service**  
**Wildland Fire Strategic Plan**

***-draft-***  
**2014-2019**

DRAFT  
11/22/2013

# 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, what the NPS Wildland Fire Program is doing and why it is being done will continue to shift. Part of the shift in wildland fire is the 2013 development of the intergovernmental “National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy” and the NPS Call to Action. This NPS Wildland Fire Strategic Plan incorporates the intent of the Cohesive Strategy as well as the background intent of the NPS Call to Action.

The purpose of the NPS Wildland Fire Strategic Plan is to identify trends to determine their effects.

This plan describes what wildland fire management leaders consider the best course of action to meet the NPS mission, and how it can be effectively implemented. The NPS Fire Management Leadership Board (FMLB), composed of regional fire management officers and the Branch of Wildland Fire chief and program leads, has developed this plan to aid the NPS in wildland fire management planning and execution.

**What** - this plan articulates the FMLB leader’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.

**Who** - Accountability for the success of this plan resides with all individuals who implement the NPS Wildland Fire Program, superintendents, fire management officers, fire staff, and others who engage in wildland fire management. Each of us will understand and use the plan to support and inform our decision-making.

## **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.

1           **How** - this plan maps out a recommended course of action for the NPS Wildland Fire Program  
2 based on current and projected conditions. As conditions inevitably change and as progress is  
3 made toward the goals, the FMLB will continually monitor, review and update the plan as often as  
4 necessary to ensure it remains a trusted reference point. The intent is to guide, validate, and align  
5 project, budget and staffing decisions at all levels of the organization to our goals.

6 The strategic goals and objectives contained in this plan articulate our best judgment of where to spend  
7 our time and attention to assure success. All levels of the NPS Wildland Fire Program will be involved in  
8 developing and maintaining a detailed implementation plan addressing the specific strategies and tactics  
9 to achieve the goals and objectives. Many components of this plan are multifaceted and complex.  
10 Therefore, prioritization of goals and objectives as well as the development of implementation strategies  
11 will require additional planning and commitment. The commitment begins with the FMLB, and involves a  
12 service-wide commitment from all who implement wildland fire.

## 13 **Trends and Predictions**

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

- 17 ● **Life safety** in firefighting activities will remain the highest priority. This remains our highest value in  
18 planning and conducting all fire management actions.
- 19
- 20 ● **Tightening federal budgets** will reduce staffing levels and force organizational adjustments.  
21 Carefully plan changes, while maintaining high standards for our wildland fire key program elements:  
22 Leadership, Program Administration, Planning & Compliance, Communication / Education, Logistics,  
23 Operations, Science & Evaluation, Record & Data Management.
- 24
- 25 ● **Climate change**, following the current trend, will increase the demand for wildfire response and  
26 increase the complexities of managing fire-adapted ecosystems. The job of understanding and  
27 managing the effects of the change will be complex and site-specific.
- 28
- 29 ● **Organized incident management** response needs will continue to increase for both wildland fire and  
30 all-hazard events. We have skills and responsibilities that transcend our agency and fire management  
31 program, and we frequently depend on others to help us achieve our goals.
- 32
- 33 ● **Environmental, economic, political and social conditions** will continue to limit the ability to  
34 achieve ecologic restoration goals in many locations. There are many challenges in achieving our fire  
35 management goals. Some are budgetary but many are not. We need to understand the challenges  
36 and be creative in overcoming them where possible, and pragmatic in understanding where they  
37 create true limitations.
- 38
- 39 ● **Understanding, communicating, and taking effective action** where we can make a positive  
40 difference in wildland fire outcome is our challenge. Wildfire will continue to shape much of the  
41 landscape, regardless of budget levels and socio-economic conditions. Many areas are likely to burn  
42 under wildfire conditions whether or not we would like them to.
- 43
- 44 ● **Funding for managing fuels** from wildland fire appropriations will continue to fluctuate. We'll need to  
45 apply our limited resources to the highest priority areas and those treatments that can achieve

1 multiple objectives. We must be creative in seeking funding from alternative sources for treatments  
2 aimed primarily at resource management objectives.

- 3
- 4 ● **Wildland-urban interface (WUI) fire issues** will continue to impact the work we accomplish. Fire  
5 response and community preparedness will continue to drive funding toward the WUI resulting in a  
6 less funding for ecologic restoration efforts. Wildfire will remain an important tool in achieving  
7 resource management objectives.
- 8
- 9 ● **Invasive species** will continue to alter ecosystems and affect management options. We will need to  
10 understand the interaction of invasive species, fire, and management practices.
- 11
- 12 ● **Public and political expectations** for restoring and maintaining ecological landscapes are  
13 increasing in ways that are often inconsistent with current scientific knowledge. We must become  
14 better at telling our story, and setting realistic expectations both within the NPS and for our  
15 stakeholders. As communicators, we must make our messages relevant to our publics and use  
16 appropriate communication tools to disseminate these messages.
- 17
- 18 ● **Information and Technology** will increasingly play a role in wildland fire management processes.  
19 The digital age presents opportunities for our organization to use technology to acquire, assess,  
20 process, analyze and disseminate information as part of a systems based approach to problem  
21 solving.

## 22 **The Road Ahead**

23 As we move forward into the second century of the NPS, the Wildland Fire Program's future evolution will  
24 be focused on:

- 25
- 26 ● Clarity of mission requirements
- 27
- 28 ● Alignment of workforce to best accomplish our mission
- 29
- 30 ● Strengthened adaptability and resilience of our culture to meet the challenges ahead

## 31 **Know Our True Mission Requirements**

32 Across the NPS Wildland Fire Program, we make decisions premised on our understanding of our  
33 mission. We work to understand not only *what* we are doing but also *why* we are doing it and *where* it will  
34 take us.

35 We have too often defined our mission objectives and priorities based upon budget availability, with an  
36 eye on continuing those actions that we have undertaken. It is likely that this lens has inhibited us from  
37 seeing some of the changes that now have a real effect on our capabilities and achievements.

38 Determining what is truly needed to conduct our mission must be the primary driving force for all  
39 components of our work; the mission requirements set the frame for our allocation of resources and  
40 management strategies.

## 41 **Alignment of Workforce to Mission**

1 Our fiscal investments and human workforce must be aligned and structured to accomplish our mission.  
2 The workforce should be examined with this perspective in mind; this effort will be ongoing and extend  
3 through every level of our organization.

4 Over the years, we have experienced changes in funding that, for a variety of reasons, have resulted in  
5 uneven growth and contraction throughout our organization. These cyclical and uneven fluctuations in  
6 funding and changes in the magnitude of fire seasons can often distort how we perceive the scope of our  
7 mission.

8 In addition, the environment in which we work continues to become more complex and indeterminate.  
9 Politics, economics, changing societal values toward public lands, long-term climate projections, air  
10 quality, ecological concerns, and a host of other factors, increasingly influence how we manage our lands  
11 and parks, especially near the WUI. Many of these factors inhibit the use of traditional methods of land  
12 management. Many of them press the very definition of what it means to be a good steward. The  
13 resulting complexity requires flexible decision-making that relies more on judgment and accountability that  
14 is verified through adherence to rules; appropriate in application of doctrine, principles and guidelines;  
15 executes responsibilities commensurate with organizational role; and appropriately uses available  
16 information.

## 17 **Enhancing Our Culture**

18 The NPS has a long-standing ethic of stewardship of park resources for the public. Historically, our  
19 internal culture includes confidence with field-level decision-making and localized focus. Continue, and  
20 strengthen, our positive characteristics and add those attributes to them which enhance our abilities—  
21 including moving towards an intent-based culture that is adaptable enough to take advantage of  
22 opportunities when they arise, and resilient enough to make the best of setbacks.

23 This translates to using the language of intent, to build stronger connections among the national, regional,  
24 and park levels. Stronger connections will entail strengthening relationships and consistent  
25 communications. It also requires leadership to provide clear direction, to delegate and entrust decision-  
26 making to the lowest practical levels. Maximize efficiencies, reassess what is feasible to accomplish,  
27 prioritize, and at times say no to doing more with less. This necessarily *requires* holding ourselves  
28 accountable to understand and deliver an accurate picture of our mission, the intent of our actions, and  
29 our values.

## 30 **Wildland Fire Management Values**

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

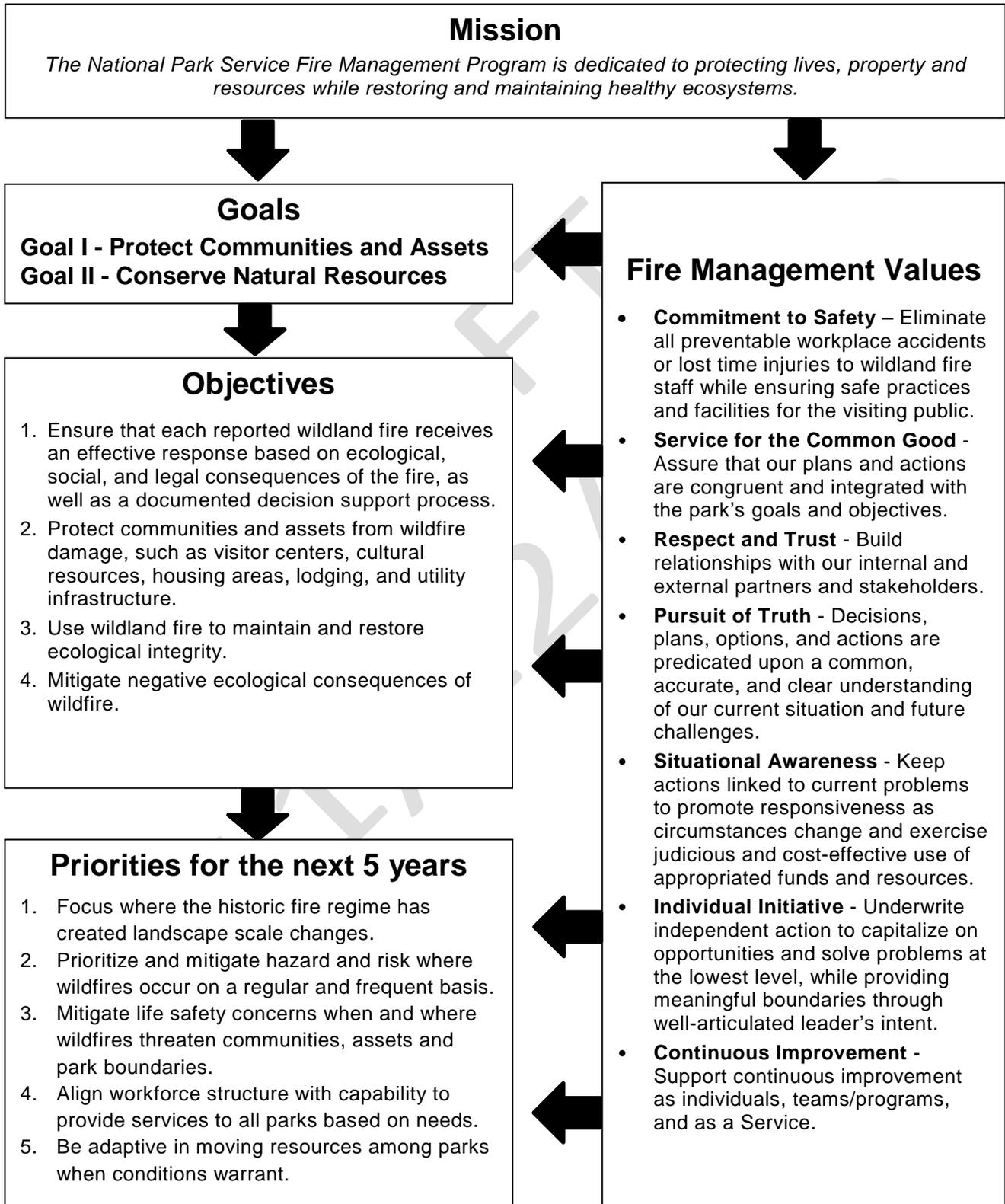
- 32 • **Commitment to Safety** - Minimize workplace accidents or lost time injuries for wildland fire staff  
33 while ensuring safe practices and facilities for the visiting public. Acknowledge that while the ideal  
34 level of risk may be zero, a hazard-free work environment is not a reasonable or achievable goal  
35 in wildland fire. No natural or cultural resource, home, or item of property is worth a human life. All  
36 strategies and tactics will seek to mitigate hazards to an acceptable level of risk to firefighters and  
37 the public.  
38
- 39 • **Service for the Common Good** - At the heart of our effectiveness, service is the value that  
40 motivates people to dedicate their time, talent, and energy to a greater good. Beyond public  
41 safety, assure that our plans and actions are congruent and integrated with the park's goals and

1 objectives, the public, stakeholders, and the NPS traditions of stewardship.  
2

- 3 • **Respect and Trust** - To be effective in our mission and meet our challenges, we build  
4 relationships with our internal and external partners and stakeholders. These relationships are  
5 based on mutual respect and trust so that they are authentic and durable, and our problem-  
6 solving will be open to constructive debate and collaborative decisions. Through these efforts, we  
7 build the basis for our credibility and influence via our transparency.  
8
- 9 • **Dedication to the Pursuit of Truth** - In pursuit of trust and service to the common good, our  
10 decisions, plans, options, and actions are predicated upon and add to a common, accurate, and  
11 clear understanding of our current situation and future challenges. Our decisions and actions  
12 incorporate lessons learned from the discovery of errors or inadequacies together with relevant  
13 scientific evidence and findings.  
14
- 15 • **Situational Awareness** - Keep actions linked to current and anticipated problems to promote  
16 responsiveness as circumstances change; we exercise judicious and cost-effective use of  
17 appropriated funds and resources.  
18
- 19 • **Individual Initiative** - Encourage independent action to take advantage of opportunities and  
20 solve problems at the lowest level, while providing meaningful boundaries through well-articulated  
21 leader's intent.  
22
- 23 • **Continuous Improvement** - Continue the tradition of the NPS by supporting continuous  
24 improvement as individuals, teams/programs, and as a Service. We foster frank and open  
25 discussion of operational performance. Leadership is provided, developed, and encouraged.  
26

# 1 Mission and NPS Wildland Fire Program Goals

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1 The management of wildland fire is a fundamental means to accomplish the NPS mission. Goal 1 and  
2 Goal 2 below will enable the NPS Wildland Fire Program to conserve natural and cultural resources and  
3 protect infrastructure necessary to provide for visitor enjoyment, education and inspiration now and in the  
4 future. To meet our goals, the NPS Wildland Fire Program will work with all NPS divisions, adjacent  
5 communities, and inter-governmental partners.  
6

## 7 **Goal I - Protect Communities and Assets:**

- 8 • Ensure that each reported wildfire receives an effective response based on ecological, social, and  
9 legal consequences of the fire.
- 10 • Protect communities and assets, such as visitor centers, cultural resources, housing areas,  
11 lodging, and utility infrastructure from wildfire damage.

## 12 **Goal II - Conserve Natural Resources:**

- 13 • Use wildland fire to maintain and restore ecological integrity.
- 14 • Mitigate negative ecological consequences of wildfire.

15  
16 These wildland fire goals directly impact how the NPS Wildland Fire Program chooses to respond to and  
17 manage wildland fire. The goals influence what the NPS does as a fire management organization and  
18 they broadly explain our resource allocations tied to implementation strategies that follow the priorities  
19 and meet objectives. In addition, they establish the framework for effectively planning an efficient  
20 organization comprised of a well-trained and well-positioned workforce, and how to make the best use of  
21 our appropriated funds. The following objectives and strategies identify what is important, what is critical,  
22 and what is feasible.

## 23 **Objectives & Strategies:**

### 24 **Goal I – Protect Communities and Assets:**

- 25 **1. Each reported wildfire receives an effective response based on ecological, social, and**  
26 **legal consequences of the fire.**

27 The conditions and circumstances, under which a fire occurs, the likely consequences to  
28 firefighter and public safety, natural and cultural resources, in addition to the values to be  
29 protected, dictate the response and management strategy for the fire. Managers will use a  
30 decision support process to guide and document wildfire management decisions. The process will  
31 provide situational assessment, hazard and risk analysis, outline implementation actions, and  
32 document decisions and rationale for those decisions.

- 33 **a.** By January 2014: The Fire Management Program Center (FMPC) will provide leadership a  
34 list of highest priority parks for wildfire that is based on the historic occurrence and possible  
35 consequences from future wildfires.
- 36 **b.** By March 2014: Regions will assess priority parks with wildfire workload and whether those  
37 parks' current fire management plans (FMP) allow for the use of wildfire to meet resource  
38 objectives, values-to-be-protected are identified, and whether wildfire hazard and risk  
39 mitigation priorities are identified and in-place.
- 40 **c.** By September 2014: Initial response plans will be reviewed and updated for highest priority  
41 parks.

1 d. By July 2015: Regions will assess wildland fire protection responsibilities, including mutual  
2 aid zones, for each park to assure jurisdiction responsibilities are clearly identified in a local  
3 operating plan that is tiered to a formal agreement.  
4

5 **2. Protect communities and assets, such as visitor centers, cultural resources, housing**  
6 **areas, lodging, and utility infrastructure from wildfire damage.**

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

10 a. By January 2014: FMPC will analyze data to identify parks where human-caused fires are a  
11 significant workload and are likely to result in costly and damaging wildfires.

12 b. By February 2014: FMPC will define criteria for identifying communities and assets to be  
13 protected.

14 c. By April 2014: Regions will identify priority parks with communities and/or assets to be  
15 protected and verify whether established FIREWISE® principles have been achieved to  
16 mitigate wildfire hazards and risk for these communities

17 d. By June 2014: Regions will assess parks with human-caused fires to evaluate return-on-  
18 investment (ROI) to mitigate these ignitions and develop a prioritized program of work  
19 addressing education, engineering, and enforcement to reduce human-caused fires in  
20 identified parks.

21 e. By June 2014: Parks with a justifiable return-on-investment (ROI) will implement programs to  
22 mitigate human-caused fire occurrence.

23 f. By October 2014: Parks in the highest priority category will become actively involved in the  
24 WUI solution by implementing principles to improve survivability of property, such as  
25 FIREWISE® / Fire Safe Principles. Once a community reaches a maintenance stage, then  
26 additional communities will be selected for mitigation.

27 g. By July 2015: Parks in the highest priority category will begin implementation of wildfire risk  
28 mitigation. Priorities will be evaluated and adjusted annually.

29 h. By 2018: Risk from wildfire to adjacent and internal communities, in the highest priority parks,  
30 has been mitigated to an acceptable level, or suppression strategies have been adjusted to  
31 address community protection needs.  
32

33 **Goal II - Conserve Natural Resources:**

34 **1. Use wildland fire to maintain and restore ecological integrity**

35 NPS Wildland Fire Program managers will collaborate with park managers to identify priority  
36 areas to use prescribed fire, non-fire treatments or wildfire to meet ecological objectives, as well  
37 as funding and staffing needed to support project implementation through 2018 for these priority  
38 areas.

39 a. By June 2014: FMPC will define the highest priority areas within the NPS that can be  
40 effectively and feasibly treated with wildland fire management activities.

41 b. By December 2014: Regions will develop program of work through 2018, including funding  
42 mechanisms and maintenance needs.

43 c. By January 2015: Parks will start implementing program of work, which will be evaluated and  
44 adjusted annually (adaptive management).

## 2. Mitigate undesirable ecological consequences of wildfire

The NPS Wildland Fire 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.

- a. By January 2015: FMPC will define the highest priority areas in those landscapes where fire regime and intensity is outside of an acceptable range with resilient landscape expectations, based on national data sets.
- b. By July 2015: Regions will develop a program of work to implement treatments in highest priority parks to enhance the ability to use wildfire on these landscapes.
- c. By July 2016: Parks will identify areas where strategic fuels treatments are needed to break up large landscapes to meet resilient landscape expectations.

## Priorities

Goals are expressed in priority order. In order to be successful in our national resource conservation efforts we first have to ensure protection of our communities and assets. This prioritization ensures alignment of social/political contexts with environmental context within fiscal constraints. Our focus will be in parks where the historic fire regime has created landscape-scale changes within their geographic boundary and where life safety issues are prominent considerations. We 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 enable us to define our priorities.

Our primary workforce focus, both for response and risk mitigation (treatment), will be in those parks where wildfires occur on a regular and frequent basis. Organizationally, we must maintain a workforce structure that can also provide the capability to meet the needs of all parks. We must maintain the ability to monitor weather trends, fuel conditions and potential ignition events which dictate when an enhanced coverage level is needed and coordinate with interagency partners who will help us respond to park fires. These partners could be other federal agency, state, and/or local partners and some may need considerable guidance to ensure that the NPS mission is met. In these locations, we will be proactive in moving resources to cover the elevated risk and probable outcomes when conditions warrant. 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.

This strategic plan, with the priorities as defined, is intended to describe how the NPS Wildland Fire Program responds to and manages wildland fire and applies at all levels of the organization. The goals portray how the fire management organization plans to meet the mission of the National Park Service. The objectives and strategies will define specific priority areas where workforce efforts can be focused to best achieve the mission. Once this solid framework for effective planning is established, an efficient organization comprised of a well-trained and well-positioned workforce can make the best use of our appropriated funds. Throughout the process of plan implementation, our wildland fire management values will be emphasized to help improve connections and increase the level of commitment and accountability of all program staff.

# 1 Roles and Responsibilities

## 2 National Level

3 The NPS Chief, Division of Fire and Aviation, is responsible for the NPS Wildland Fire Program  
4 leadership and management at the national level. The NPS Branch of Wildland Fire, located at the  
5 National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC), Boise, Idaho, establishes priorities and provides national intra  
6 and inter-agency coordination of wildland fire policy development, service-wide program standards and  
7 practices for implementation, as well as wildland fire internal management controls, construction and  
8 review.

## 9 Regional Level

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

## 18 Park Level

19 NPS park superintendents and, when delegated, fire management officers or designated fire coordinator,  
20 are responsible for developing, implementing, and evaluating wildland fire management activities within  
21 their parks. The park superintendent and fire management officer will coordinate with interagency  
22 partners, local fire departments and other nearby parks. Park superintendents will ensure that their  
23 employees are trained and made available for participation in wildland fire management activities as the  
24 situation demands. Employees with operational, administrative, or other skills will engage in and support  
25 wildland fire management efforts as necessary.

26

1 **Glossary**

2

Term	Definition
<b>Fire extent</b>	The size and shape of individual fires
<b>Fire frequency</b>	The time between fires including the average and interval variability
<b>Fire intensity</b>	The energy released during combustion
<b>Fire Management Plan</b>	A plan that identifies and integrates all wildland fire management and related activities within the context of approved land/resource management plans. It defines a program to manage wildland fires (wildfire and prescribed fire). The plan is supplemented by operational plans, including but not limited to preparedness plans, preplanned dispatch plans, prescribed fire burn plans and prevention plans. Fire Management Plan's assure that wildland fire management goals and components are coordinated.
<b>Fire seasonality</b>	The seasonal timing of fires with respect to vegetation phenology
<b>Fire severity</b>	Effect of a fire on ecosystem properties, usually described by the degree of soil heating or mortality of vegetation
<b>Planned Ignition</b>	The intentional initiation of a wildland fire by hand-held, mechanical or aerial device where the distance and timing between ignition lines or points and the sequence of igniting them is determined by environmental conditions (weather, fuel, topography), firing technique, and other factors which influence fire behavior and fire effects (see prescribed fire).
<b>Prescribed Fire</b>	Is a wildland fire originating from a planned ignition to meet specific objectives identified in a written, approved, prescribed fire plan for which NEPA requirements (where applicable) have been met prior to ignition (see planned ignition).
<b>Protection</b>	The actions taken to limit the adverse environmental, social, political, and economical effects of fire.
<b>Response</b>	The mobilization of the necessary services and responders to a fire based on ecological, social, and legal consequences, the circumstances under which a fire occurs, and the likely consequences on firefighter and public safety and welfare, natural and cultural resources, and values to be protected. (syn. Response to wildland fire)
<b>Suppression</b>	All the work of extinguishing a fire or confining fire spread.
<b>Unplanned Ignition</b>	The initiation of a wildland fire by lightning, volcanoes, unauthorized and accidental human-caused fires (see wildfire).
<b>Wildfire</b>	Unplanned ignition of a wildland fire (such as a fire caused by lightning, volcanoes, unauthorized and accidental human-caused fires) and escaped prescribed fires.
<b>Wildland Fire</b>	A general term describing any non-structural fire that occurs in the wildland.
<b>Wildland Urban Interface (WUI)</b>	The line, area, or zone where humans and their development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuel

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