



Reading Fire Q&A

When did the Reading Fire Start? When was it contained? How big was it?

The Reading fire was caused by a lightning strike on July 23, 2012 after a storm passed through the area. The fire was fully contained on August 22, 2012. The fire size totaled 28,079 acres, of which 16,993 acres are on NPS lands, 11,071 acres on US Forest Service lands, and 75 acres on private lands. Not all of the vegetation in the fire area burned and some areas did not burn at all. The resulting pattern of green vegetation and burned vegetation is called a mosaic. No structures were lost, and one injury was reported.

Where in the park did it start?

The fire started in a wilderness area approximately one mile northeast of Paradise Meadows between the Terrace Lake and Paradise Meadows Trails at about 7,100 feet elevation.

What kind of fuel (vegetation) was the fire burning in when it started?

The fire started in an open canopy of red fir. As the fire grew to the east and northeast, it was burning in mixed subalpine forests composed of red fir, white fir, white pine, and lodgepole pine. The fire was consuming mostly surface fuels such as litter, duff and logs.

What did the firefighters do when they arrived at the fire?

Nine firefighters went to assess the fire, gather information about the vegetation, terrain, weather, and fire behavior — how slow or fast it might be burning. After they walked around the area to investigate whether or not there were natural barriers such as rocky areas, bare ground, streams, and other man-made barriers like roads and trails, their observations and resulting information was used to determine if the fire was an adequate candidate to use for meeting resource management objectives.

Why didn't they put the fire out when it was small?

Wildland fire is an essential natural process. In areas where there are no immediate threats to the public, firefighter safety or structures, firefighters may monitor a fire and take action as needed. Fire has shaped our wildlands for thousands of years and is important for the survival of many plants and animals. A plan was put together to manage the fire with pre-determined boundaries based on the natural barriers, man-made barriers, and observed fire spread. However, embers crossed one of the pre-determined boundaries — the park road — and started spot fires in dense lodgepole pine in a location unsafe for firefighters to reach. The fire then spread outside the park boundary until it was contained.

How many firefighters helped put out the fire?

From the beginning of the fire to the end of the fire management efforts, the number of firefighters matched the size of the fire as well as the number needed to manage the fire for the planned management objectives. As the fire grew beyond the planned boundaries, the objectives for managing the fire changed and more firefighters and equipment were requested. Therefore the number of firefighters changed from about nine at the beginning to over 1,270, then back to nine or fewer that will monitor the fire through the fall and early winter when rain and snows puts the fire out.

Did the fire kill all the trees?

No, the fire did not kill all the trees. Fire creates a patchwork of burned and unburned vegetation called a mosaic. After trees burn, sunlight can reach the forest floor, new plants grow in these newly opened areas to replace burned ones and increase habitat diversity. Patches of old tree stands mixed with the newly opened patches breaks up continuously dense areas of forest. These mosaics or patches will slow down the movement of the next fire and decrease its intensity.



Reading Fire from Lassen Peak on 8/6/12



A firefighter removes fuel



Mosaic burn pattern along roadside



Firefighters scout for spot fires

Did the fire kill a lot of animals?

No, most animals fly or walk/run away or burrow out of harm's way during active burning; however, they usually do not move far. Many animals are fire-adapted and rely on periodic fire to renew the varied habitats they depend on. Fires typically create a mosaic of burned and unburned vegetation. Many animals like to forage along the edges of burned areas and find cover in unburned areas. Standing dead trees provide habitat for cavity-nesting birds like woodpeckers. Fire increases food availability by stimulating seed production. New meadows will become grazing areas for animals such as deer and elk. Wildlife also benefit from nutrients in new plant growth and ash that they eat. Deer often go into recently burned areas to escape mosquitoes and flies. Fire also benefits berry production in some areas, increasing the food source for many animals.

How many years will it take for the stands of trees killed by the fire to have plants regrow?

This depends on the type of forest, how favorable the site conditions are (e.g., soil quality and moisture), how many times it has burned, and how hot the fire was. Understory plants such as grasses, forbs and shrubs will begin to occupy most burned areas immediately from buried seeds (scarified by the fire), seeds blown in from nearby plants in unburned areas, or resprouting of roots that survive the fire. As for trees, some species are adapted to regenerate very quickly like lodgepole and aspen. Other species such as true firs may reoccupy burned areas over a period of one to several decades depending on fire severity. Some forest types historically were fire resistant while others were fire resilient. For example, Jeffrey pine have thick bark and are able to resist low intensity fires, whereas lodgepole pine are easily killed by fires of all intensity but regenerate quickly and prolifically afterward (i.e., resilient). Park managers have strived to maintain fire resistance Jeffrey pine through low intensity prescribed burns. Lodgepole pine and other high elevation forest types require more variable intensity fires to maintain diversity.

What is a BAER Team? Will one come to the Reading Fire?

A BAER (Burned Area Emergency Response) Team is a team of specially trained professionals: hydrologists, soil scientists, engineers, biologists, vegetation specialists, archeologists, and others who rapidly evaluate burned areas and plan emergency stabilization treatments. BAER does not seek to replace what is damaged by fire, but to reduce further damage due to the land being temporarily exposed in a fragile condition. While many fires cause little damage to the land, some require special efforts to prevent damage from events such as erosion, flash floods, and debris flows after rain. BAER work may also prevent permanent loss of habitat for threatened and endangered species, and the spread of noxious weeds.

A joint National Park Service and U.S. Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team has been assigned to the Reading Fire. They will produce a BAER/BAR (Burned Area Rehabilitation) Plan to identify specific treatments needed to stabilize and prevent unacceptable degradation to natural and cultural resources within the fire area. Not all areas within the Reading Fire perimeter have been burned, or will need BAER treatments. Numerous areas will recover naturally.

Where is it safe to look at the Reading Fire impacted areas?

Safe areas include parking lots, pullout areas and roads. These areas include, but are not limited to, Hot Rock pullout, Dersch Meadows pullout, Devastated Area parking area, and Hat Creek parking area. Please check with the visitor center staff for additional information and safety advisories as conditions may change.

Where can I learn more information about managing and lessons learned from both wildfire and prescribed fire?

Request information at park visitor centers or go visit the park website to learn more about park programs and fire management: <http://www.nps.gov/lavo/parkmgmt/firemanagement.htm>. Lassen Volcanic National Park offers a Junior Ranger Firefighter program in the summer months. Special Web Ranger activities to learn more about the National Park Service and Fire can be found at: www.webrangers.us/activities/fire/ or www.webrangers.us/activities/firetools/. Other fire information websites to visit: www.nps.gov/fire/, www.firescience.gov/, www.wildfirelessons.net.



A red breasted sapsucker in a burn area near Raker Peak



Fire effects visible from Hot Rock pullout



Mosaic burn pattern visible from Devastated Area



A member of a fire team from Susanville, CA