



Winter Snowfall and Fire Season

It has been in the news all winter: California is seeing below normal winter snow and rain fall. Is California in an El Nino or La Nina cycle?

The parks were at 30% of average snowpack for much of the winter. Late season storms have helped, but the parks are still anticipating below normal snowpack for the Sierra (estimated at 45% of average based upon initial April 1 snow survey results).

Most of the media focuses on what this means for water supply in the state. After all, the Sierra Nevada mountains store water that becomes our drinking water, is used in our homes, and for agriculture. It's an important discussion.

For fire staff in the park, the discussion is about what it means for fire season. Wet years lead to shorter fire seasons and more moderate fire behavior. The forest fuels stay wetter longer so the likelihood of lightning or human-caused fires becoming large is reduced.

Wetter years provide the best windows for prescribed fires. In 2011, the parks passed on summer projects for smoke management reasons. However, the parks completed prescribed fires into the late fall because the conditions (fuel moisture, temperature, relative humidity, etc.) were still within the prescription to safely complete the projects and achieve ecological and community protection objectives. The Redwood Canyon Prescribed Fire successfully tackled a complex fuels problem during a wet year.

Dry years are more problematic. We can anticipate that the spring prescribed fire window may shift (for example, it may come earlier and end earlier). The mixed conifer forest will likely dry sooner and be more receptive to lightning and human-caused fires. The parks will more likely implement fire restrictions as a fire prevention measure.

If the parks reach high fire danger ratings, fire managers will seek severity funding to ensure firefighter staffing during high-risk periods (the afternoon to evening when the day is hottest and driest and when most ignitions occur).

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Crew 91 Prepares for Fire Season



Top Photo: Allen Welch, of Crew 91, works on a chainsaw. All equipment must be "fire-ready" at the end of every shift. Bottom photo: Crew 91 during the pre-season readiness review. The review tests crew fitness, crew standards (communication protocols, etc.) and helps the crew understand the terrain and fuel types they will be working in. Crews also practice for certain scenarios, such as responding to serious injuries.

NPS photos

Project Locations for 2012

The parks are planning **11 projects** this year totaling up to **3,619 acres**. They are designed to improve protection of communities and restore or maintain forest health. Remember, the ultimate timing and completion of burns depends on funding, air quality, local and national fire activity, fuel moisture, and weather.

1 Valley Floor (140 acres)
Late fall prescribed fire

2 North Boundary
(248 acres)
Fall prescribed fire

3 Lodge (22 acres)
Fall prescribed fire

4 Swale East 3
(263 acres)
Fall prescribed fire

5 Whitaker (512 acres)
Summer prescribed fire
Interagency (NPS, UC Berkeley)

6 Halstead (686 acres)
Fall prescribed fire

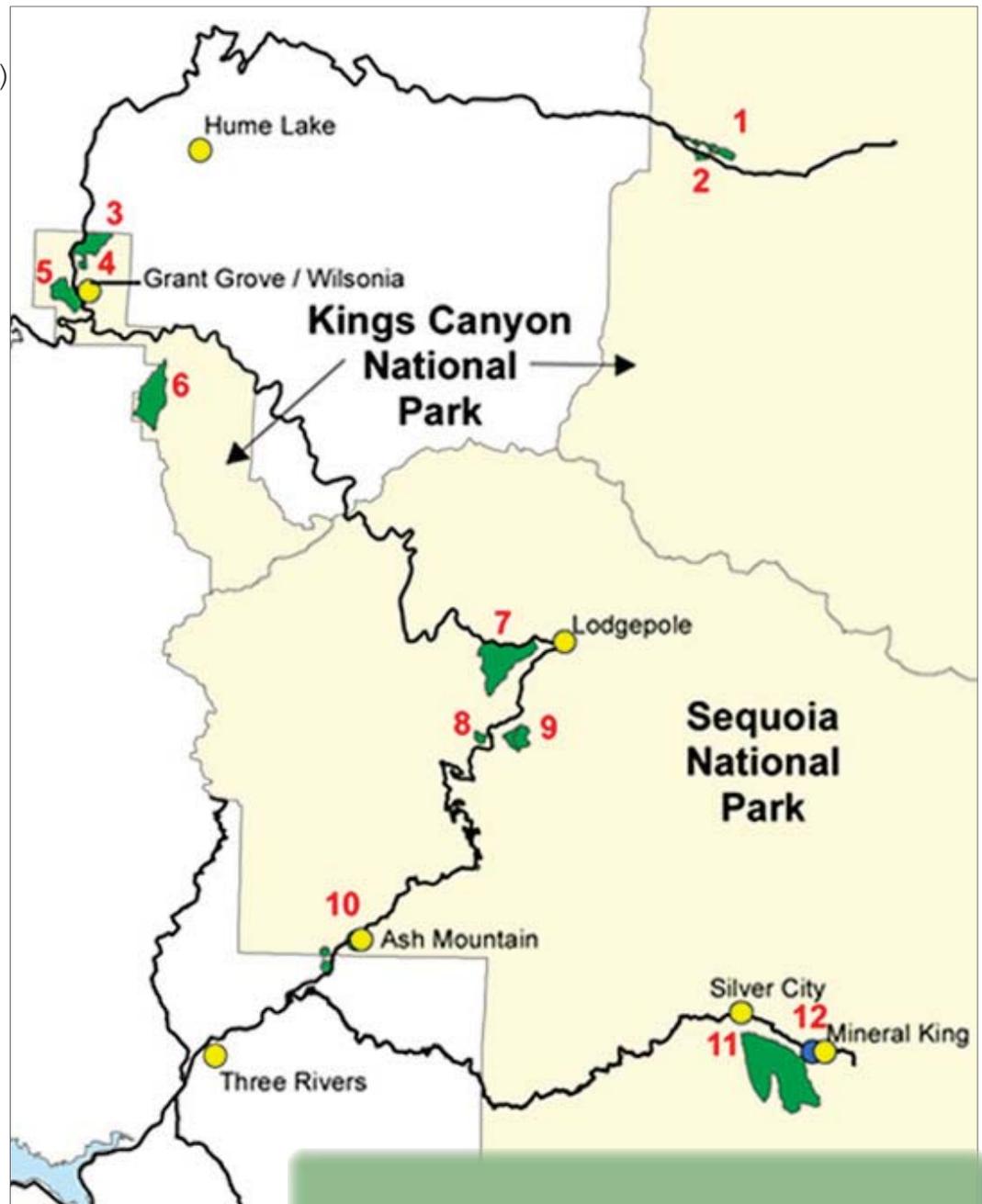
7 Round Meadow Segment B
(50 acres)
Summer prescribed fire

8 Circle Meadow
(183 acres)
Summer prescribed fire

9 Ash Mountain / Hospital Rock
(25 acres)
Spring/early summer prescribed fire

10 Mosquito
(1485 acres)
Fall prescribed fire

11 Faculty Flat
(5 acres)
Mechanical thinning



What About Unplanned Fires?

Lightning fires and human-caused fires are unplanned events. NPS crews are trained to respond to these situations. When necessary, the parks shift priorities from planned projects to respond to other fires.

The Fire and Fuels Management Brochure is Going Electronic

Since 1999, the Fire Education Specialist for Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks has sent brochures to residents of gateway communities with information about the fire program, planned fuels projects, and (starting in 2003), a second mailing to review the fire season.

After evaluating this process, it is now time to change with the times. An electronic version of this mailer is more environmental and more cost effective.

The parks will still be providing valuable information about its fire management programs (both pre-season and post-season), including planned fuels treatment projects (prescribed fires and mechanical thinning treatments), steps to plan for fire season in the Sierra Nevada, successes in the fire program, features and highlights about fire crews and incidents, and a review of the overall fire season.

It will simply be in electronic form.

How will it work?

If you want to receive the ebrochure, email debra_schweizer@nps.gov and share the email account where you would like to receive the ebrochure. You may also call 559-565-3703 and provide the same information.

Links to printable copies will be provided. As always, your information and privacy will be protected.

I still want a hard copy delivered.

If you would still like to receive the brochure in the mail, please share your mailing address with Deb Schweizer (same contact information listed previously). A limited printing (in-house and therefore lower print quality) will accommodate those of you who still like to hold the brochure in your hand.

Do you want to receive fire updates as well?

During fire season, regular email updates provide notifications for prescribed fires and mechanical thinning projects, our response to wildfires in the parks, and what the conditions are for visitors and residents (fire restrictions, trail closures, smoke conditions, etc.).

Some of you may receive these notifications already. This email list will be handled separately from the ebrochure. The parks recognize that some of you want the more detailed information and others do not. However, if you do want to receive fire updates and information as well as the ebrochure, please indicate that in your email or phone call.

Winter Snowfall and Fire Season (*continued*)

However, it is worth remembering that the Southern Sierra is a highly fire-prone ecosystem. Fire season always comes to the foothills by summer and to the mountains by late summer. Fire is one of the realities of living in this area.

What have you done to prepare for fire season? As always, homeowners should take steps to reduce the risk of wildfire near their property. Defensible space measures, home construction (certain materials are more fire resistant than others), and knowing what you and you loved ones (including your pets) will do in the event of a fire should all be part of planning for fire season.



Crew 91 prepares a prescribed fire unit by digging fireline, and clearing vegetation and hazard trees along the unit perimeter.

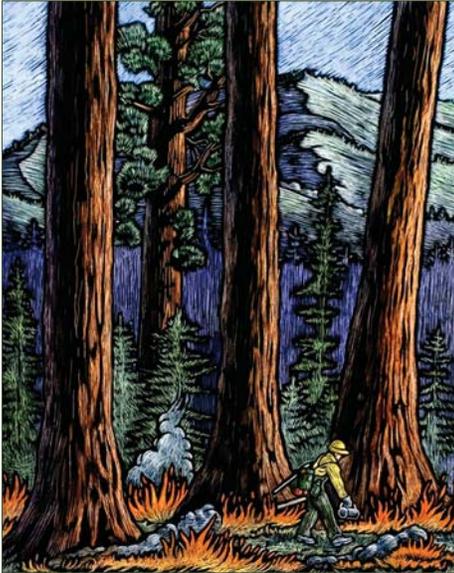
NPS photo



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For more information
www.nps.gov/seki/naturescience/fire.htm

Postal Customer



This is the last printed Fire & Fuels Management brochure. See page 3 for details on how to receive this information electronically.



Members of Crew 91 inspect their fireline packs. It is vital that firefighters know where their equipment is located in the pack, that their emergency fire shelter is easily accessible and in good shape, and that they can comfortably stow everything in the pack that may be on their backs for a 16-hour day.