

**Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Prescribed Fire
Valley Forge National Historical Park
go.nps.gov/vaofire**

Spring 2019

Where are the areas that will be burned?

The two areas are located along and between Gulph Road and Route 23 – please refer to the project map for exact locations.

How many acres will be burned?

Two separate fields will be burned; totaling approximately 135 acres. The larger field is about 105 acres and the smaller is about 16 acres. About 14 acres of forested area may also be burned adjacent to the smaller meadow to treat non-native invasive plants and to promote seedling regeneration.

Why was this area selected?

This area was selected because of a combination of preferred elements such as:

- These fields are not immediately adjacent to residential areas
- They have a diverse mixture of native and non-native plant species.
- They are within the Grand Parade, a high priority management area for the park.

How many people will be working on the prescribed fire?

The prescribed fire plan recommends a minimum of 14 personnel to implement burning each field, and we anticipate additional personnel from other National Park Service sites, other federal land management agencies, the PA Bureau of Forestry, and other agencies.

How will NPS contain the prescribed fire?

To the extent possible, existing roads and trails will be used as containment lines for the fields. As necessary, sensitive areas and field edges that are not bounded by a road or trail will be mowed prior to ignition. The mowed area will be wetted with water before and/or during ignition. The perimeter will be patrolled throughout the operation to confirm the fire is contained. Wind conditions and soil and vegetation moisture levels will dictate the exact time of ignition. If winds are too high and/or relative humidity is too low, the prescribed fire would be halted to assess if it should be terminated or continued when conditions are more favorable conditions.

Will historic features in the area be safe?

Yes, in a historic park like Valley Forge, cultural resources must be protected; however, no monuments or other standing historic features are located in either prescribed fire field. Though not historic, a recently constructed rest area in the valley of the Grand Parade will be protected. We will protect and monitor significant features during the prescribed fire.

Are there other areas locally that use prescribed fire to manage vegetation?

Yes, Gettysburg National Military Park, Fort Indiantown Gap, Antietam National Battlefield (Sharpsburg, MD), Richmond National Battlefield Park, Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area, several Pennsylvania State Game Lands, and Longwood Gardens each use prescribed fire.

Have local fire groups and governments been contacted?

Yes, we have informed all local fire companies as well as all the adjoining municipalities, the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, the Norfolk Southern Railroad and the Pennsylvania Bureau of Forestry.

What is the cost of burning this area?

The average cost per acre is approximately \$150 per acre.

How is the burn being funded?

This project will be funded through an NPS fuels management funding source.

What exotic plant species is the burn targeting?

The burn will help control high priority invasive plants found in the fields, like Oriental bittersweet (*Celastrus orbiculatus*),

Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*) and Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*).

Safety precautions

Safety is our number one goal. All personnel working to conduct the burn are required to wear fire resistant clothing and carry fire shelters, similar to equipment used on a wildland fire. A prescribed fire plan describing safety and emergency response procedures has been completed and approved prior to implementation. EMT's will be on scene.

Injury to wildlife

Large mammals and birds will typically leave a burn area due to the level of human activity. This prescribed fire is not expected to generate enough heat to harm wildlife sheltering underground, and smaller mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians tend to seek shelter in holes and burrows to avoid injury. As an additional precaution, the field will be walked to identify and, if necessary, relocate wildlife prior to fire ignition.

Smoke concerns

Due to the size of the fields and grass fuel, which burns quickly, smoke problems should be minimal and of short duration. The greatest immediate impact can be smoke on adjacent roads. Motorists are advised to drive with extreme caution and adhere to posted signage and the directions of law enforcement. Traffic may be temporarily slowed or halted if smoke is excessive. However, generally the smoke generated during burning should dissipate rapidly and should not be noticeable to park neighbors soon after burning operations are completed. Fields will be burned one at a time.

Artifacts in the ground

Archeological sites/ artifacts buried underground are protected. A pilot study at Valley Forge showed that the speed at which the fire will move over the landscape and the short time until the vegetation has burned out has no impact on buried artifacts. The area will be surveyed by the park archeologist before and after the burn to locate any exposed artifacts.

Effects on plants

The fire will remove dead vegetation and kill early spring invasive plants. This should produce more robust grass growth through the summer due to the removal of thatch, exposure of the soil to seeds, and an influx of nutrients from the ash. It's expected the fields will require fewer mowing and herbicide applications over the next three to four years). The vegetation response will be assessed following the burn.

Training and qualifications

Personnel working on the project must meet federal prescribed fire qualification standards. Key personnel have years of experience conducting prescribed fires.

Use of prescribed fire in Pennsylvania

Prescribed fire utilization is becoming a more common practice in Pennsylvania among various agencies and groups including PA Bureau of Forestry, PA Game Commission, The Nature Conservancy, the USDA Forest Service, and Natural Resource Conservation Service. Last year, Pennsylvania state agencies conducted 241 prescribed fires, burning a total of 13,485 acres in the state.

Weather conditions

Weather conditions on site must be within parameters, referred to as a prescription, established in the prescribed fire plan. Personnel will obtain a spot weather forecast for the area from the National Weather Service, and will monitor temperature, relative humidity, and wind to ensure the criteria are within prescription throughout the duration of the prescribed fire.

If it gets away

If the prescribed fire escapes, resources on scene will extinguish any fire outside of the burn area as fast as safely possible; other firefighting forces can be called if needed. The prescribed fire plan contains contingency plans in the unlikely event that the prescribed fire escapes.

Who should I contact if I have further questions?

Contact the park Public Information Officer at 610-783-1008.