



The Carr Fire and Whiskeytown Lake. *USFS Photo.*

During a record-tying heat wave in late July of 2018, the Carr Fire began inside Whiskeytown National Recreation Area (NRA). Immediate and aggressive response by emergency services personnel saved significant amounts of human life and property. Nevertheless, over 97 percent of the park's 42,000 acres burned. Outside the park, almost 200,000 additional acres burned. Overall, three firefighters and five civilians lost their lives, 1,600 buildings were destroyed, and there was \$1.6 billion in damages. The Carr Fire was the most destructive fire in the history of the National Park System.

## Unprecedented Destruction

In the midst of a summer season that witnessed numerous large wildfires burning across the western United States, the Carr Fire was reported on the afternoon of July 23, 2018. It was discovered inside the park, burning along Highway 299 near Carr Powerhouse Road. The fire ultimately grew to 229,651 acres, an area larger than the physical sizes of San Francisco and Oakland combined.

The fire began at the peak of summer heat and drought conditions. Temperatures throughout the first week of firefighting tied local records, topping out at 113 degrees Fahrenheit. Vegetation was extraordinarily dry and some fire danger indices were at or near historic levels.

Despite a swift full-suppression response, the fire underwent dramatic growth,

particularly on the night of July 25. Extreme fire behavior included a fire tornado occurring within the city of Redding, the fire jumping Whiskeytown Lake as well as the Sacramento River, and the fire's plume cloud creating its own lightning and thunder.

Whiskeytown NRA's infrastructure was profoundly affected by the fire. Over 100 structures were destroyed including five of six park residences as well as several cabins at the Whiskeytown Environmental School. Footbridges, boats, boat docks, signs, water treatment buildings, and several historic fruit trees dating from the 1850s burned. The fire was also a traumatic event for park staff, as many employees residing outside the park lost their homes and belongings - not just physical scars but emotional scars remain from the Carr Fire.

## But Some of the Green Forest Remains

While many manmade structures in the park were destroyed, and while the vast majority of the park's landscape burned, the overall intensity of fire activity varied greatly. Weather, time of day, fire direction, topography, vegetation type, and fuels treatment history all influenced fire behavior.

To create fuel breaks, the park had been conducting prescribed fires for several decades. Previously treated areas burned less intensely during the Carr Fire.

Outside of previously treated areas, there are pockets of vegetation in the park that were nearly untouched. One reason for this is that in places like the upper Brandy Creek and upper Crystal Creek drainages, steep topography combined with colder, shaded slopes and associated vegetation to naturally deter the fire.

Pockets of lightly burned and unburned vegetation have created a mosaic pattern on the park's landscape. Look for this green among the black during your visit.

## Carr Fire Frequently Asked Questions

### What parts of the park are open? What parts are closed? Why?

The employees of Whiskeytown NRA have been working extremely hard since the fire to reopen the park. As a result, much of the frontcountry has reopened. This includes the marinas as well as most lakeshore day use areas, trails, and beaches. To safely reopen these areas, over 11,000 hazard trees (11,000!!!) were removed and four footbridges were replaced.

While much of the frontcountry has reopened, backcountry areas, primarily on the steep slopes of Shasta Bally, remain closed. This highest mountain in the park has highly erosive soil. With significant vegetation and soil burned on Shasta Bally, many spots do not have much organic soil left to hold things in place. As a result, in the first winter after the Carr Fire, major trail, bridge, and handrail washouts occurred. This damage as well as the threat of post-fire debris flows pose extreme safety hazards.

Slowly but surely, as vegetation restores itself, and as the park's trail crew is able to turn to the backcountry, the entirety of Whiskeytown NRA will reopen. However, this will not happen overnight. We ask for your patience in the meantime.

### How were the waterfalls damaged?

Whiskeytown Falls and Crystal Creek Falls have been reopened to hiking. Due to several factors including the steep topography and cooler north-facing slopes, the areas around these waterfalls received only minimal damage.

### Is the park re-planting the forest?

The National Park Service recognizes fire as a natural process, and most species at Whiskeytown NRA are fire adapted.

The park is generally letting ecosystems recover naturally. This said, oak seedlings are in the process of being planted in day use areas to provide additional future shade for beachgoers and picnickers.

### Why are you not cutting down all the burned and blackened trees?

To date, park staff and contractors have cut over 11,000 hazard trees. Burned trees that are considered hazardous to public safety are cut down along traffic corridors and in developed areas. Away from these areas, burned trees remain to create habitat for wildlife.

### What will happen to the cut wood? Can we take it home?

While much of the cut wood has been left in the forest to allow for natural recycling, some wood has been piled in developed areas. To provide cheap firewood to the local community and to remove these wood piles from the park, in early 2020, wood-collecting permits were made available to the public. This program was well-received by the local community and the park hopes to offer more of these permits in the future.

### As a park visitor, how can I stay safe?

It's important to note that there are always risks involved in outdoor recreation. It's also important to note that the Carr Fire has increased these risks. Hazards include but are not limited to falling trees and abandoned mine features. Please be aware of these hazards and pay attention to them when you are out exploring the park - look up, look down, look all around! Also, please stay out of closed areas.

*For more info on the Carr Fire and the park's ongoing recovery efforts, visit [www.nps.gov/whis](http://www.nps.gov/whis).*



Acorns collected by park staff and volunteers in 2019 have become these baby oak trees. After propagation in this CalFire nursery, the young trees will be transplanted at popular day use areas of Whiskeytown NRA to provide future shade for beachgoers and picnickers. *CalFire Photo.*