



# NPS Fire and Aviation Management

## *Supporting the National Park Service Mission*

*In the National Park Service, Fire and Aviation Management facilitates Wildland Fire Management, Structural Fire Management, and Aviation Management.*



Wildland fire in Oregon



Wildland fire in Florida



Structural firefighter

### **Wildland Fire Management**

The history of fire management in national parks dates back to Yellowstone, the world's first national park. In 1886 the U.S. Army was brought in to protect the park from hunting, trapping, grazing, logging, and fire. The soldiers were this nation's first paid wildland firefighters. Formal wildland fire management at a national level began in the National Park Service in 1926, 10 years after the establishment of the bureau. Fire management was and still is addressed primarily at the park level.

Suppression of fires was the main orientation of the young fire management program, though there were some proponents of light burning or prescribed fire, which is the term we use today. By the 1950s, prescribed fire was taking place in several National Park Service units, such as Sequoia, Everglades, and Pipestone. The evolution of fire management continued through the late 1960s and in the 1970s some parks began using prescribed natural fire, fire which is ignited through natural forces, like lightning and on rare occasion, lava and volcanic ash. Today, the term for naturally ignited but well managed fire is wildland fire use.

Scientific discoveries and advancements have enhanced the wildland fire management program by encouraging support of landscape and ecosystem management rather than treating parks like isolated islands. Today parks have fire management plans in place which assist park and fire managers in decision-making on a landscape scale and may include partners in other bureaus and agencies.

Throughout the years, a key aspect of fire management that has remained the same is the top priority of firefighter and public safety. At no time will this objective be compromised.

### **Structural Fire Management**

The National Park Service is the nation's steward for over 21,000 structures, many of them historic; many national icons, such as the Statute of Liberty; and over 80 million artifacts. These structures include hotels, motels, cabins, visitor centers, interpretative centers, and historical buildings, such as Independence Hall and many former presidents' homes. In terms of buildings alone, the National Park Service is the federal government's third largest landlord – behind only the Department of Defense and the U.S. Postal Service.



Structural fire training

The National Park Service enabling legislation, as well as other statutes, is responsible for ensuring that the buildings and artifacts entrusted to it are protected and that the people who visit or work in them are safe from undue hazards or risks. The Structural Fire Program assists the Service in its mission to preserve and protect human life and the resources entrusted to its management.



Helirappellers are sometimes used in initial attack firefighting, reaching a fire by rappelling from a helicopter to the ground.



Planes or helicopters may be used to monitor fires in remote areas.



Helicopters are often used in firefighting to cool down a fire with large buckets of water.

The National Park Service maintains a structural fire capability that meets the diversity and complexity of the different units of the System. The structural fire program provides service-wide policy, standards, operational procedures and accountability; addressing development of new agency policies for structural fire safety responsibilities, developing minimum fire safety requirements, and making park managers aware of them.

The program emphasis is on prevention and education rather than reaction and response, and develops a process for conducting structural fire inspections at each unit of the national park system. The program strives to ensure that all units within the system have an appropriate level of structural fire protection that is provided in a safe and cost effective manner by qualified personnel.

#### Aviation Management

The first aircraft owned by the Department of the Interior was operated by the National Park Service at Cape Hatteras National Seashore starting in the early 1930's.

Pilot Dave Driskill was the first pilot employed by NPS. Dave provided transportation for personnel and supplies to the remote park areas up and down the Outer Banks of North Carolina.

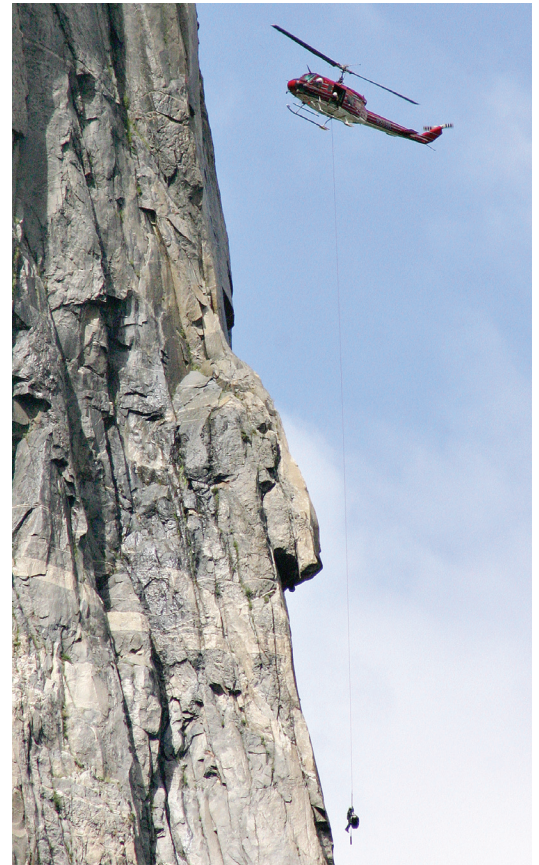
Aircraft were used for firefighting efforts immediately after World War II with the introduction of smokejumpers in Glacier National Park in 1946 and Yellowstone in 1951.

Today the National Park Service uses aviation resources to support a wide variety of park programs. Aviation resources are used for search and rescue, law enforcement and visitor protection, natural resource management, wildlife management, wildland and prescribed fire management, dignitary protection, facility management and personnel transportation.

Aircraft from fleet and private vendors fly approximately 17,000 hours annually in support of NPS programs. There are 24 aircraft within the National Park Service between single engine airplanes and helicopters.

#### Fire and Aviation Management

Working together with partners, the Division of Fire and Aviation Management provides programmatic support and policy direction which support the NPS mission.



Rescue operation

Source of historical information used in this document: Rothman, Hal K. (2005). *A Test of Adversity and Strength: Wildland Fire in the National Park System*

Available through <http://www.nps.gov/fire/>