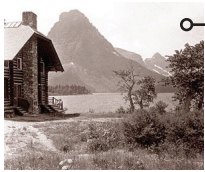




National Park Service Wildland Fire Timeline

A Sampling of Significant Events

The vision of the national park system has evolved with our changing country. Wildland fire has been no different and has always been a concern of the National Park Service. Ideas and perspectives on wildland fire have shifted and re-shifted, but the concern for preserving and protecting these priceless pieces of nature and culture have always been the top priority. Here is a timeline of the key events of wildland fire and the National Park Service.



● 1872 – Yellowstone National Park is established as the first national park.

1885 – House Committee dealing with Yellowstone National Park declares that “the most important duty of the superintendent and assistants in the park is to protect the forest from fire and ax.”

● 1889 – To reduce wildfires, camping in Yellowstone is only allowed in designated areas. This leads to the system of designated campgrounds now common on public lands.

1916 – The National Park Service is established within the Department of the Interior to manage national parks and monuments.

1922 – The Protection Act (42 Stat. 857;16 USC 594) authorizes the Secretary of the Interior not only to protect Departmental land from fire, but also to cooperate with both Federal and state agencies, as well as private landowners.

1926 – Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Superintendent, Colonel John White, orders his rangers to conduct a number of controlled burns to reduce ground fuels even though this was against policy.

1932 – Eighteen fire danger stations are established in the Intermountain West, including at Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks.

● 1936 – Fires in Glacier National Park destroy buildings in the Many Glacier area of the park. Only through the efforts of firefighters and hotel employees was the Many Glacier Hotel saved.

● 1947 – “Remember, Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires” is first used on a Smokey Bear poster.

● 1956 – The first practical drops of water and chemicals onto wildfires begin, and helicopters begin to assist with firefighting.

1958 – Everglades National Park ignites its first prescribed burn on Long Pine Key.

1961 – El Cariso Hotshots field-test early fire shelter design.

● 1962 – Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Cherokee National Forest join forces to establish the “Appalachian Air Tanker Project”. The cooperation of this 45+ year relationship continues today.



1965 – The Boise Interagency Fire Center is established cooperatively by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service to improve fire and aviation support throughout much of the Great Basin and Intermountain West.



1968 - The Kennedy Ridge Fire in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks is the first managed lightning fire for the NPS or any federal land management agency

● 1972 – Moccasin Mesa Fire Mesa Verde National Park – A lightning caused fire burns on Mesa Verde National Park and on Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Lands. The park fails to recognize the potential for cultural resource damage from fire suppression activities.



1974 – The National Park Service moves its Wildland Fire Management Program to the Boise Interagency Fire Center.

1977 – NPS Fire Management Policy, NPS-18, provides standardized terminology, direction and guidance for the fire management program. Each park is required to evaluate its fire needs and develop a fire management plan.



● 1988 – A total of 248 fires start in greater Yellowstone. In the end, 7 major fires are responsible for more than 95% of the 1.2 million acres burned. Five of those fires are ignited outside the park, and 3 of them are human-caused fires that firefighters attempted to control from the beginning.

1993 – Boise Interagency Fire Center changes name to the National Interagency Fire Center to better reflect its national mission and coordination between member agencies.



2000 – The National Fire Plan is adopted which increases funding, and commits federal land management agencies to treat 40 million acres of brush and dense forest by burning and thinning during the first decade of the new century.

● 2003 – New generation fire shelter becomes available for firefighters' use.

2008 – Pilot program begins allowing specific parks and specific units within the other land management agencies (U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Indian Affairs) to manage wildland fires for one or more objective(s).



Change over time in forest density at Yosemite National Park's Confederate Group

Credit: Monica Bueno