



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Alaska Eastern Area Fire
Management Program

Fire Communication and
Education
PO Box 9
Denali Park, AK 99755

907 683-6423 phone
907 683-9624 fax

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

Wildland Fire Use

Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve

2004

683 fires burned 6.5 million acres during the 2004 Alaskan fire season and in so doing, defined the season as the largest since fire reporting began in the 1950's. One may ask, "How could so many acres escape initial attack?" Most did not. 460 wildland fires ignited in areas designated for initial attack and only 14 escaped initial attack efforts. The majority of the burned acres fell within Limited Suppression areas, areas where the cost of suppression may exceed the value of the resources to be protected, the environmental impacts of fire suppression activities may have more negative impacts on the resources than the effects of the fire, or the exclusion of fire may be detrimental to the fire dependent ecosystem. Throughout the 2004 season, Alaska Fire Management actively monitored these fires.



Nation River Fire, NPS Photo



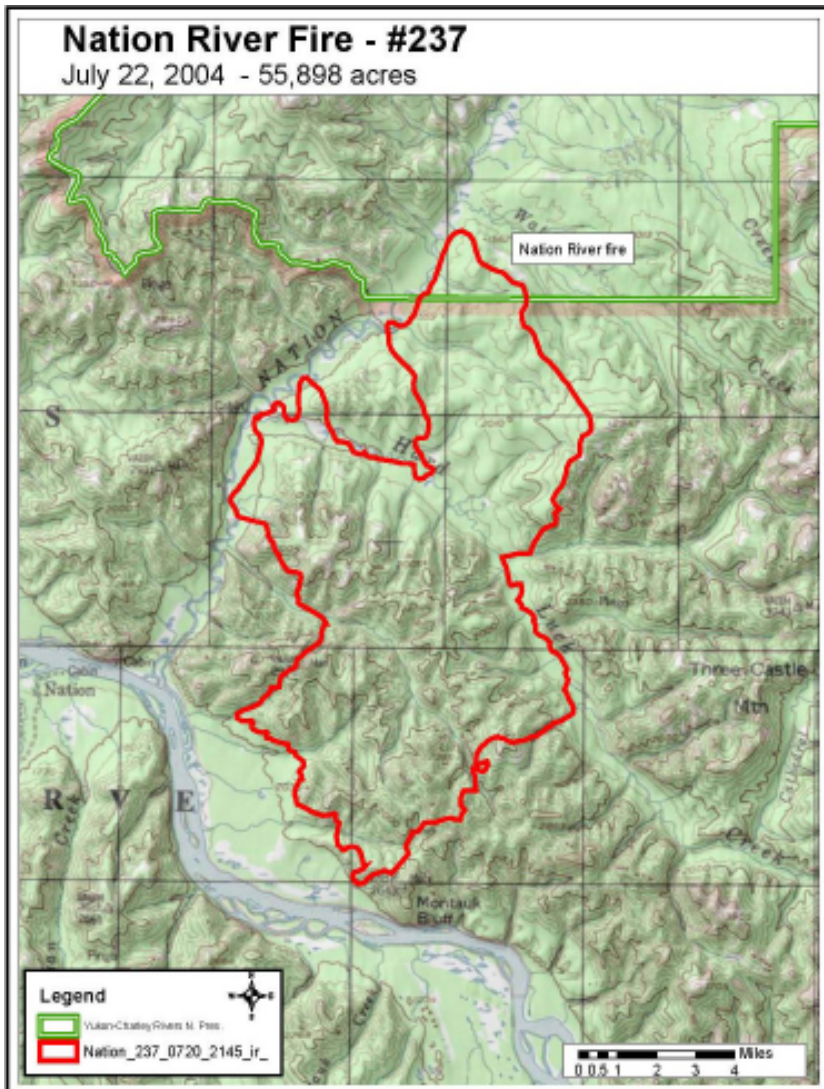
Nation River Fire near the Yukon River, NPS Photo

In Alaska, the National Park Service is not a primary suppression agency. When a fire ignites on parklands in a Limited Suppression area, the suppression agency works in close concert with the NPS Fire Management Officer so that the fire is managed according to NPS policy. Typically, the suppression agency or NPS Fire Management monitors the fire, dependent upon available resources. With the recent completion of fire management plans for Alaska NPS parklands, this way of doing business changed in that the NPS can now manage some Limited Suppression fires as wildland fire use fires.

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Wildland fire use is a management action equal to wildfire suppression and receives consideration, management attention, and management policies equal to wildfire suppression. Wildland fire use fires are naturally-ignited wildland fires which accomplish specific resource management objectives in predefined designated areas.



Nation River Fire Perimeter Map, NPS Map

96% of Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve, located in the northeast part of interior Alaska, lies within a Limited Suppression area. Six fires ignited and burned in the preserve during the 2004 season and of these six, the Nation River Fire was treated as a wildland fire use fire.

Different than a Limited Suppression fire where documentation is not completed unless the decision is made to suppress the fire, a non-standard response, during the initial stages of a wildland fire use fire a Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP) is completed. Because the WFIP requires more detailed documentation, the Nation River Fire Use Fire allowed the NPS to begin working towards enhancing long-term assessment tools for managing wildland fire use fires. Farsite, a long term assessment tool for fire spread,

was not widely used in Alaska prior to 2004 as it was felt that the boreal forest would not be accurately modeled. The NPS tested this theory and found that Farsite very accurately modeled the fire growth on the Nation River Fire. The NPS plans to continue this pursuit of tools in order to aid all the Alaskan agencies in making better, long term fire management decisions regardless of what label the fires are given.