

Midwest Region Fire Management

2002 Success Stories

Closing Remarks

The implementation of the National Fire Plan has brought many challenges to the parks within the Midwest Region of the National Park Service. Those challenges have been met head on by park superintendents, staffs, and most notably by the regional and park fire management employees.

I am continually amazed at the “can-do” attitude that always seems to surface. There are the evolving fire effects crews and fire ecologists, always ensuring that the objectives of the prescribed fire and hazard fuels mitigation projects are being met. The dedication of the natural and cultural resource management divisions provides a continual reassurance that this collaborative effort will meet objectives. The cooperation that occurs within the parks in completing work is an accomplishment worth noting. All of this is done despite the challenge of doubling the prescribed fire acres and almost tripling the number of projects to be completed.

We all know in our hearts why we signed up with this outfit. For most of us, it is the opportunity to protect the resources and we take great satisfaction in knowing that we are meeting those objectives. Resource protection rangers, maintenance employees, interpretive specialists, and other park support personnel continually “step up to the plate.” They leave the comfort of their jobs, and families, to make a stand against the destructive wildland fires that rage across our landscape each season. This past summer was especially difficult, as our employees were already responsible for providing homeland security at many of our national treasures and other potential targets of terrorism.

We have been very successful in meeting many of the challenges of the National Fire Plan, and I am confident that we will continue to do so. But there is one looming challenge that is going to take a commitment from all, and that is the completion of all Park Fire Management Plans by the end of 2004. The completion of these plans is not something that any one employee or contractor can accomplish on their own. It will take the dedication of all of our employees. We must see this planning process through to the end. The work will be difficult but, as I have heard many times before, “If you want the best - come to the Midwest.” I am confident that our parks and employees will meet this challenge.



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The Midwest Region and the National Fire Plan

The Midwest may be a place most people travel through or fly over on their way to somewhere else. Yet, from the National Park Service perspective, it's an area as diverse and complex as it is beautiful. National Park Service units in the Midwest represent a diversity of ecosystems: mixed-grass prairie, oak/hickory forests, northern pine forests, oak savannas, and tallgrass prairies. As diverse as the vegetation represented at each of the park sites, so too is the story they each tell. Isle Royale National Park has wilderness, wolves, moose, and an active Fire Use Management policy. Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore has one of the largest diversities of plant species found in the National Park Service while sitting amidst industry and urban areas. Theodore Roosevelt has a prairie ecosystem and mega-fauna that remind visitors of the west that once was. Buffalo National River has miles of scenic river and a fire management program aimed at restoring the forest ecosystem to that of a hundred years ago.

Implementation of the National Fire Plan in the Midwest Region requires vision, enthusiasm, dedication, commitment, knowledge, and the ability to be flexible and work with a variety of audiences and targets. The 2002 fire season was busy and full of accomplishments for the parks, staffs, and partners of the Midwest Region.

Hazardous Fuel Reduction
In 2002, the Midwest Regional fuel targets went from 18,000 acres to 34,000 acres. In this same year, 27,000 acres were accomplished and 85% of all hazardous fuel projects were completed. This placed the Midwest Region with the 2nd highest accomplishment record in the National Park Service.

Firefighting
The Iowa Loess Hills Type II crew was mobilized for an out-of-state suppression assignment. This team was staffed with Iowa State, Nature Conservancy, and National Park Service personnel, many of whom took personal leave to go on assignment. The Midwest Regional Fire Management staff provided basic fire training to the crew, using Rural Fire Assistance funding.

The Battle Creek Fire burned a total of 13,700 acres in western South Dakota. The fire burned very intensely for several days, heading toward the town of Keystone and Mount Rushmore National Memorial. As the fire approached, individuals and communities worked together to prepare private property and the Memorial for a possible fire run. Volunteer and rural fire department personnel worked with interagency teams to educate home and business owners and to fight the fire as it approached. National Park Service personnel from surrounding park service units worked diligently to remove hazardous fuels from office and housing areas. Public information was provided to thousands of Mount Rushmore visitors. The collaboration and work during the Battle Creek Fire is just one example of many across the country where communities, individuals, and firefighters worked together to protect property and lives.

Accountability
The Midwest Region sent National Park Service personnel on 575 fire assignments during the 2002 summer fire season. Some of these personnel were dispatched through the newly created interagency dispatch centers in Missouri and Indiana. The Midwest Region Fire and Aviation Manager was instrumental in establishing these dispatch centers in 2002.

The Fire Management Office at Voyageurs National Park sponsored a Landscape Strategies Workshop in 2001. During this meeting, goals for using fire to accomplish resource management objectives were outlined. As a result of this workshop, an outstanding Fire Management Plan was created. The Fire Management Office is working with six other Park Service sites in the Border Waters area to create fire management plans compliant with the latest policy.

Community Assistance
Ozark National Scenic Riverways hosted one of the first Student Conservation Association (SCA) Fire Education Corps teams for the National Park Service. This team, local volunteer fire departments, and National Park Service personnel worked collaboratively with local communities and homeowners to provide Firewise information. Firewise is a nationally recognized program that advocates home design, construction, and landscaping methods that help slow the spread of fire. A total of 230 home evaluations were conducted in a twelve-week period. Hundreds of other individuals were educated about Firewise through information kiosks and meetings.

Rehabilitation/Restoration
Badlands National Park and Devils Tower National Monument are having success in using fire to remove exotic plant species. Fire effects crews, using protocols outlined in the National Park Service Fire Monitoring Handbook, are monitoring permanent vegetation plots within project burn units. Some impressive data is being recorded that shows a reduction of exotic grasses in the Northern Great Plains mixed-grass prairie ecosystem. Native grasses are able to gain a larger foothold and re-establish their habitat.

Midwest Region Fire Staff



Back row: David Given - Deputy Regional Director, Jim DeCoster - Ecologist, William Schenk - Regional Director
Middle row: Bobby Bloodworth - Fuels Specialist, Nick Chevance - Planner, Paul Mancuso - WUI Coordinator, Doug Alexander - Wildland Fire Specialist.
Front row: Steve Marien - Meteorologist, Janelle Smith - Budget Analyst, Kathie Hansen - GIS Specialist, Fred Bird - Fire and Aviation Manager, Kathleen Harter - Information Specialist.
Missing from photo: Connie Burns - Program Assistant

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Hazardous fuels are removed at Mount Rushmore National Memorial during the Battle Creek Wildland Fire.



Prescribed fire is used at Wind Cave National Park to reduce hazardous fuels and maintain a prairie ecosystem.



Iowa Loess Hills Type II crew at the Apple Fire in southwest Oregon. The crew was made up of Iowa State, the Nature Conservancy, and National Park Service personnel.



Prescribed fire at Theodore Roosevelt National Park is used to reduce tree encroachment on a prairie ecosystem.



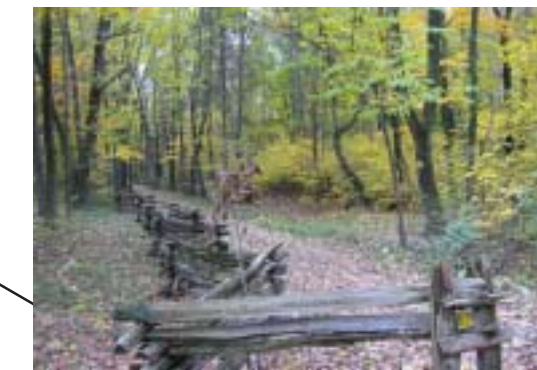
Voyageurs National Park has completed its Fire Management Plan and is working with other Border Waters parks to complete their plans.



Through the Rural Fire Assistance program, Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore provided Bert Township, Munising Township, and the city of Munising with wildland fire fighting tools and training.



Effigy Mounds National Monument designed and implemented the largest WUI project in the region. Working with a local contractor, a 100 foot corridor was created along 12 miles of roads and trails, removing 768,000 tons of fuel.



As a result of the National Fire Plan, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial is in the planning stages of bringing prescribed fire to the park. This site of national cultural significance will experience fire for the first time in its history.



The Timber Rural Fire Department, Missouri Department of Conservation, and Shannondale Community Conservation Association (SCA) Ozark Team and the National Park Service with the Defensible Space Demonstration Project.



Prescribed fire is used to create a fuel break around a historic structure in a natural setting at Buffalo National River.



Legend

- National Park Units
- FIREPRO FMO Park
- Collateral Duty FMO Park
- Other NPS Parks
- ▲ NPS Offices

