

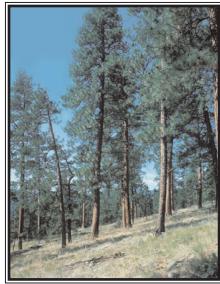
# Wildland Fire: A Natural Process



WILDLAND FIRE EDUCATION WORKING TEAM

Wildland fire management agencies and organizations share common goals: to enhance personal safety and reduce loss of life while preserving and enhancing the health of forests, rangelands, prairies, and wetlands.

## ROLE OF WILDLAND FIRE



**Wildland fire is an essential, natural process.** Fire has helped shape our wildlands for thousands of years and is important for the survival of many plants and animals. Fire reduces accumulation of vegetation that can inhibit plant growth, and some plants and animals depend on fire for survival. In fact, periodic fire stimulates growth, reproduction of plants, and provides wildlife habitat. For example, lodgepole pines need fire to warm their cones, allowing them to open and drop seed. Fire behaves differently throughout the country. In addition to fuels, such as vegetation, fire behavior is affected by weather and terrain. Virtually all vegetation types in the United States can experience wildland fire.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS

**Society's influence has altered historic fire cycles, leading to a dangerous and difficult buildup of vegetation in our wildlands.** Social and cultural approaches to wildland fire over the past century have focused on preventing and suppressing all wildland fire. We continue to learn and now have a more complete understanding of the essential role fire plays in our environment. When paired with the right terrain and weather conditions, dense buildup of vegetation leads to fires that burn hotter, last longer, and spread faster. As a result, these fires become difficult to manage and can threaten areas of residential development. In addition, excess vegetation and lack of fire in some areas is threatening plant and animal life.



## WILDLAND FIRE MANAGEMENT

**Land management agencies are committed to a balanced fire program that will reduce risks and realize benefits of fire. The safety of firefighters and the public is the No. 1 priority of land management agencies.**

Land management agencies' fire management programs are customized for specific wildland areas to restore the land to more natural conditions, maintain already healthy ecosystems, and protect neighboring communities. Fire management programs are designed based on a balance of needs, including fire suppression, prevention, and fire use. There will always be a need for prevention and suppression to protect people and communities.

**Fire is a management tool** used to accomplish specific objectives in a plan such as removal of excess vegetation or stimulating plant growth and regeneration. Fire use is a managed process with comprehensive guidelines that prioritize safety and direct the planning and operations of the activity.

- **Naturally occurring fires**, such as those caused by lightning, are either suppressed or allowed to burn in a closely monitored and confined area, based on the fire plan for the area.
- Sometimes it may be necessary and/or beneficial for land managers to start fires in a closely monitored and confined area. These fires are referred to as **"prescribed fires."**
- A fire program also may include **non-fire treatments** to prepare the land before natural or prescribed fire can be applied safely and effectively.

## PARTNERSHIPS FOR WILDLAND FIRE

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Improving the health of the land and reducing risks to communities requires partnerships among federal and state agencies, tribal governments, fire departments, communities, and landowners. Fire burns where conditions are right. Fire does not acknowledge jurisdictional boundaries of federal, state, or local agencies or tribes or private landowners. Agencies, tribes, and communities are working together to understand and accept what it means to live in a fire-prone area and to realize the benefits of managing fire in the wildlands.

- Agencies and tribes are managing public and tribal lands through comprehensive fire management plans and programs.
- Agencies and tribes also are working to educate local governments and property owners on ways to make their land and property more defensible against wildfire.



People who live and recreate in fire-prone lands assume a certain level of risk and responsibility due to the condition of the surrounding environment. People can live compatibly with fire, if they take action to be aware of — and prepared for — local fire conditions.

- Landowners and land users are encouraged to mitigate fire hazards on private property, use recreational fire safely, and support fire management efforts so land management agencies, tribes, and firefighters can focus on public lands. This will ultimately reduce loss of life, property, and natural resources.
- Contact your local, state, or federal agencies or tribal fire management organization to determine your community's fire conditions and discover tips to reduce your community's fire vulnerability — before a fire starts. Information is also available at [www.firewise.org](http://www.firewise.org).
- The more populated and closer a community is to fire-prone areas, the greater the need for proactive fire management.
- Smoke from prescribed fire is a sign that steps are being taken to reduce risks and realize benefits of fire. The more land management agencies can plan and manage fire, the more they can reduce smoke impacts.

## PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

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The National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) was chartered in 1976 to provide a means for agencies to coordinate programs, constructively work together and avoid duplication of efforts. NWCG is a unifying force behind wildland fire management in the United States. It helps ensure member agency efforts are consistent and coordinated while working collaboratively toward common goals.



For more information about the NWCG, go to: <http://www.nwcg.gov>.

For additional wildland fire information, go to:

- National Interagency Fire Center – <http://www.nifc.gov>
- USDA Forest Service – <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/>
- U.S. Department of the Interior agencies, including:
  - Bureau of Indian Affairs – <http://www.bianifc.org/>
  - Bureau of Land Management – <http://www.fire.blm.gov/index.htm>
  - National Park Service – <http://www.nps.gov/fire/>
  - US Fish and Wildlife Service – <http://fire.r9.fws.gov/>
- National Association of State Foresters – <http://www.stateforesters.org>
- The Nature Conservancy – <http://www.tncfire.org>

NWCG utilizes working teams, which designate specific task groups to address projects, issues and concerns relevant to wildland fire management. The Wildland Fire Education Working Team (WFEWT) develops and provides effective, interagency education programs and products to communicate about and for wildland fire management. This document was developed by the WFEWT Fire Messaging Task Group.

