



Public Scoping for Channel Islands National Park Wildland Fire Management Plan

Project Scoping for Environmental Assessment

March 18, 2022

The National Park Service is initiating the planning process to prepare an environmental assessment (EA) for an updated Wildland Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Channel Islands National Park in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and federal wildland fire policy. This EA will facilitate proposed updates in NPS and interagency fire management policies and procedures, fire management strategies, and management of natural, cultural, and human resources. Public input and suggestions for fire management at Channel Islands NP will be gathered and considered during preparation of the EA and FMP.

Background

Channel Islands National Park (Channel Islands NP or park) consists of five islands located off the coast of Southern California—Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, and Santa Barbara—, all within Ventura and Santa Barbara counties. The Park includes submerged lands and waters within one nautical mile of each island and provides a diverse marine environment that protects a rich array of natural and cultural resources.



Anacapa Island

Photo Credit: Tim Hauf

The Channel Islands are home to over 60 native terrestrial species, which includes endemic species found nowhere else such as the island fox. The Park also provides vital nesting, nursery, and feeding grounds for a variety of seabirds and marine mammal species as well as critical resources for migratory species.

Cultural resources are abundant, and demonstrate millennia of human occupation and use, from the 13,000-year-old Arlington Springs archeological site—important evidence that some of the earliest humans to enter the western hemisphere were already using watercraft—to early 20th century ranches and lighthouses. Traditionally associated Native American tribes and groups hold deep and abiding historical and cultural ties to the islands; ranching families and others also retain historical connections.

The Park includes a mosaic of vegetation types, with each island being unique and having its own vegetative fuels management needs. The islands encompass private property, and other federally owned and operated lands. Wildland fires can endanger human life and property and may damage or destroy park resources.

As part of its mission to protect and restore native plant and wildlife communities, the National Park Service initiated removing exotic eucalyptus groves followed by prescribed pile burning in 2006 to reduce hazard fuels and to restore native plant species. Debris generated from eucalyptus treatments, routine maintenance from vegetation cutting, and construction have been piled and left to dry to prepare for pile burning. Currently, debris piles from projects are still waiting to be burned because the categorical exclusion based on the Healthy Forest Initiative that authorized prescribed

pile burning is no longer allowed. The current Channel Islands NP fire management plan may be found at [NPS | 2006 CHIS FMP](#). The wildland fire program at the park is facilitated by cooperative or assistance agreements with the Los Padres National Forest, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), the park's tribal partners, U.S. Navy and Coast Guard, Island Packers (the park concessionaire), and other organizations.

Purpose and Need for a Fire Management Plan

The purpose of a revised and updated Channel Islands Wildland Fire Management Plan is to comply with Director's Order 18 (DO-18; NPS 2008) and Reference Manual-18 (RM-18), which states that "all parks with burnable vegetation must have an approved fire management plan." Additionally, an updated Fire Management Plan would be consistent with and support current park planning documents and NPS agency direction.

An updated plan is needed to reduce threats to human life and property (both within park boundaries and adjacent private and other federal lands) and to park natural and cultural resources from wildfire. Historically, wildfires on the Channel Islands have been rare events, primarily due to maritime conditions (high humidity). Currently, changes in fuel conditions and increased human activities have increased wildfire risk on the islands. Non-native blue (*Eucalyptus globulus*) and red gum eucalyptus (*E. camaldulensis*) that were planted in the 1880s for shade, fuel, and building projects. These trees have invaded riparian areas and pose



Eucalyptus Grove Photo Credit: Tim Hauf

safety hazards in developed areas (e.g., risk of hazard trees and limbs falling on public, structures, and in recreation areas). Climate change has also increased potential for wildfires due to

vegetation drying out and increased flammability in longer periods of reduced rainfall. To reduce threats from wildfire to property and resources, defensible space needs to be established around park buildings and infrastructure. Defensible space involves strategically reducing hazardous fuels around infrastructure and park values that could be negatively impacted by wildfire.

Until this EA process is complete, and an updated FMP is approved, Channel Islands NP will continue to suppress all wildfires and limit their vegetation management/fuel reduction activities to those allowed under existing categorical exclusions. For example, mowing for defensible space work and pruning or cutting of exotic tree species may occur as part of routine maintenance of facilities, grounds, trails, utilities, and non-historic structures.

The Channel Islands NP FMP planning area includes all five park islands. The new FMP would provide a management framework for all wildland fire activities, both planned and unplanned ignitions, that would best meet overall resource management and protection goals for the park. A new FMP would emphasize safety and provide guidance to effectively reduce hazardous fuels, resulting in enhanced protection of park resources and adjacent lands.

Preliminary Alternatives

As part of this planning process, park staff have identified two alternatives. Additional alternatives or changes to the preliminary alternatives may result from public comment and input.

Alternative A: No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative would allow the park to suppress all wildfires. Emergency response actions for wildfire suppression would consider the needs to protect cultural and natural resources and infrastructure but would focus on suppression activities. Minor defensible space maintenance work and removal of exotic species may occur under valid categorical exclusions.

Alternative B: Proposed Action

The proposed action would include wildfire suppression emergency response actions as described for the No Action Alternative and fuel management activities listed below. The proposed action would integrate more resource protection activities into the Wildland Fire Management Program. The Park does not anticipate proposing broadcast burning (landscape-scale prescribed fire) because vegetation is still recovering from years of grazing, and current research shows that natural fire was infrequent on the islands.

- Pruning, limbing, and/or removal of hazard trees using manual and mechanical tools, followed by chipping and prescribed fire pile burning.
- Cutting and removal of exotic eucalyptus trees using manual and mechanical tools, followed by prescribed pile burning. Additional methods for disposal of debris piles and large eucalyptus trees, such as air curtain burners and helicopter transport would be considered. Selective removal of eucalyptus trees will allow some older eucalyptus trees with historic significance to remain. The proposed eucalyptus removal is proposed for both TNC and NPS lands on Santa Cruz Island.
- Creating and maintaining defensible space by removing hazardous fuels around infrastructure and critical natural and cultural resources. The defensible space zone would typically vary from 50 to 200 feet but would vary by sensitivity of the infrastructure to fire, type of vegetation, aspect, prevailing wind direction, and slope. Many structures already have defensible space in place.

All fuel reduction and defensible space activities would be planned to minimize impacts on natural, cultural, and human values that CHIS was created to protect. In some cases,

actions may support the maintenance or restoration of natural and cultural resources.

Potential Impact Topics



Island Fox
Photo Credit: Tim Hauf

Key planning issues identified include protecting air and water quality, natural and cultural resources, human health and safety, soundscapes, viewsheds, visitor use and experience, and wilderness character.

Planning Process

The basic steps of the planning process are:

- **Public scoping/input period (March 18 to April 17, 2022)**
- **Public scoping meeting, virtual open house format:**
 - **April 5, 2022 from 4–5 PM online**
- Preparation of the EA
- **Public review and comment of the EA (expected mid-summer 2022)**
- Analysis of public comments on the EA
- Preparation of the decision document
- Announcement of decision
- Drafting and approval of the new FMP

Bold Text = Formal opportunities for the public to comment: during this initial public scoping period and following the release of the EA.

During the public scoping period, NPS would like to receive comments on the alternatives, affected resources, or concerns related to Channel Islands NP fire management activities. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA and FMP, and before managers make a final decision.

How Do I Comment On This Project?



Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/chis>



Submit written comments to the park's visitor center or by mail to the address below.

**Superintendent
Channel Islands National Park
1901 Spinnaker Drive
Ventura, CA 93001**

All comments must be received by April 17, 2022.

Note: Comments will not be accepted by fax, e-mail, or any other way than those specified above. Please also note that your entire comment—including personal identifying information such as your address, phone number, and e-mail address—may be made publicly available. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. Comments submitted by individuals or organizations on behalf of other individuals or organizations will not be accepted.