

Kings Mountain National Military Park Kings Mountain State Park Crowders Mountain State Park



Public Scoping and NEPA Process for the Kings Mountain Parks Interagency Fire Management Plan

Project Scoping for Environmental Assessment

November 21, 2014

Kings Mountain National Military Park (KIMO) is joining with its neighbors, Kings Mountain State Park (KMSP) in South Carolina, and Crowders Mountain State Park (CRMO) in North Carolina, to develop a joint Fire Management Plan (FMP). Policy from federal and state agencies recommends developing FMP's on an interagency basis whenever possible. Before this interagency FMP is developed, the National Park Service (NPS), in cooperation with the state parks, is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA is part of the process to address changes in fire management strategies, vegetation communities, and fuel loading that has occurred over the years since historic settlement of the area, and since the 3 parks were created. This EA process will be employed to gather public input and suggestions for the interagency EA and FMP. This newsletter launches the public scoping phase for the EA.

Background

The Kings Mountain area is a relatively small, but scenic ridge that rises above the surrounding countryside and exhibits abundant forest, vegetation and wildlife habitat. The area looks much different from pre-settlement conditions when lightning or Native American ignited fires were frequent. The frequency of these fires varied from 2–100 years, depending on wind patterns, sheltering, vegetation types, and other natural factors. Generally the fires were low intensity ground fires that reduced underbrush, small trees, and forest litter and debris. Trees were larger and more widely spaced; the ground was covered with grasses and forbs; cane breaks were more widespread in riparian areas; and “balds” or meadows with scattered clumps of trees predominated on higher ridge areas.

KIMO was created by congress to protect the site and scene of a pivotal battle in the Revolutionary War. After the war the area was altered by human activities such as logging, farming, and homesteading before the parks were established; regrowth of forests and fire suppression contributed to creating the thick successional forests now found in much of the area. These forests are more susceptible to non-characteristic stand replacing, or high severity wildfires. These types of fires may become larger, more frequent, and more difficult to control with climate change. They create risk to park facilities, the historic landscapes such as the Kings Mountain battlefield, private property structures adjacent to the parks, and natural plant and wildlife communities.

Kings Mountain natural and fire dependent communities have provided niches for wildlife and plant species for thousands of years and are at risk of being lost due to altered vegetation structure brought about by all these changes.

All 3 parks have initiated limited programs of prescribed burning and vegetation management, but are embarking on this planning process to provide future direction.

Until the interagency FMP is completed, the parks will continue to suppress wildfires and engage in limited vegetation management activities allowed in their guidance documents. A new FMP is vital to address the need to manage vegetation and fire on an interagency basis; the need to better protect facilities and neighboring private properties; the need to restore fire dependent communities and related species; and to incorporate updates in national fire policy and terminology. For the new FMP, the parks are considering pro-active strategies to more actively manage Kings Mountain vegetation and wildland fire.

Fire Management Goals

The parks plan to follow these broad goals as they develop the new FMP:

1. Firefighter and public safety is the top priority
2. Protect NPS, state and private infrastructure, facilities and property.
3. Manage and maintain historic, cultural, recreational, and aesthetic landscapes.
4. Restore and protect natural and ecological values.
5. Minimize high severity and human caused/unwanted wildfire.
6. Promote communication and cooperation on fire management activities between agencies and the public.

Each park may develop individualized objectives that relate to the above goals. For example, KIMO plans to emphasize efforts to restore and maintain the battlefield vegetation as to how it appeared during the 1780 battle. KMSP wants to stress defensible space protection of its living history farm area. CRMO's intent is to reduce understory leaf litter to reduce wildfire risk, and to promote the germination of fire dependent species, such as bear oak (*Quercus ilicifolia*), as well as native grasses and ferns.

Planning Process

Internal scoping by park specialists and staff started the EA process on September 16, 2014. This EA will be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that 1) explores management alternatives to meet park(s) objectives, 2) evaluates potential impacts to park resources and values, and 3) identifies mitigation measures to minimize the degree of these impacts.

The EA will at least evaluate a “No Action Alternative” and two “Proposed Action Alternatives”. Additional alternatives or changes to these alternatives could result from public comments. The draft alternatives are:

A) The “No Action Alternative” would continue what is now occurring in each park. KIMO would continue using the strategies in its current fire management plan. Fire suppression, prescribed burning, mowing of grass areas, and spot treatment of invasive vegetation by herbicide would continue. Handheld mechanical equipment such as chainsaws and leaf-blowers would be utilized in support of the above activities. Mechanical treatments such as mastication, and wildfire managed for resource objectives would **not** be allowed. There would be **no** interagency FMP; each park would follow its own management direction.

The attendant negative effects would include continued accumulations of hazardous fuels and the associated risk both to human structures and to natural and cultural resources; the individual park approach to fire and vegetation management might prevent the synergy that an interagency approach would provide in a joint FMP.

B) “Proposed Action Alternative (#1)” would allow the use of a full array of fire management tools/strategies including suppression, prescribed burning, mowing of grass areas, spot treatment of invasive vegetation by herbicide, mechanical treatments using wheeled or tracked equipment (mastication), and wildfire managed for resource objectives. Handheld mechanical equipment such as chainsaws and leaf-blowers would be utilized in support of the above activities. Under this alternative, there would be **no** aerial or

While “wildfire managed for resource objectives” could be utilized, use would be limited due to the relatively small size and shape of the park areas, and lack of natural ignitions (lightning). If utilized, it would be in limited circumstances where fire risk is not excessive, for short periods of time, where important values were not threatened, and the burning conditions are similar to prescribed fire prescriptions. Upon confirming a managed natural ignition, the fire management staff would immediately develop the future containment boundaries of the wildfire. Wildfires managed for resource objectives would not be allowed to cross a park boundary without the agreement of the adjacent park or agency. Wildfires managed for resource objectives would only be used if the ignition was in an area that had burned relatively recently, so that fire effects would be helpful for ecological restoration or fuel reduction.

vehicle spraying of herbicides by the NPS, and widespread thinning of larger trees (over 6-inch diameter) would not occur. The FMP would be interagency between all three parks, but could include differences based on different park objectives and state regulations.

C) “Proposed Action Alternative (#2)” would include the full array of fire management tools as discussed in the second alternative, but would exclude managing wildfires for resource objectives. The FMP would be interagency between all three parks, but could include differences based on different park objectives and state regulations.

Additional objectives and mitigation tactics would be developed as part of this EA process to minimize the impacts to park resources and manmade improvements. Examples of potential mitigation activities include defining when/where wildfire for resource objectives is appropriate; measures to protect wildlife, soils, and water resources during vegetation management activities; and local public notification procedures for prescribed burns. Prescribed burns would have formal objectives developed under a separate burn plan, and would only be implemented by qualified fire personnel.

Park managers would implement any changes at a reasoned pace to allow wildlife, vegetation, residents, and visitors time to adjust to the management changes regardless of which alternative is selected. All actions would be dependent on future funding. The parks believe that a well-managed and focused fire and vegetation management program is vital to the protection and restoration of these parks.

Steps in the Process

There are two formal opportunities for the public to comment: during this initial public scoping period, and again following the release of the EA document. You are invited to participate in this process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, comments, or concerns related to Kings Mountain parks area fire management activities. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA and before managers make a final decision.

The basic steps of the planning process for this project include:

- **Public scoping/input period (November 21–December 21, 2014)***
- **Public scoping meeting, open house format, December 9, 2014 at 6:30 PM, Kings Mountain National Military Park visitor center***
- Preparation of the EA, (public release expected early summer 2015)
- **Public review of the EA***
- Analysis of public comments on the EA
- Preparation of decision document
- Announcement of decision
- Drafting and approval of the new FMP

*** indicates formal opportunities for public comment**

Resources and Concerns

The Environmental Assessment will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources including:

Air Quality, Soil, Floodplains, Wetlands, Vegetation, Wildlife, Species of Special Concern, Cultural and Historic Resources, Public Health and Safety, and Visitor Use & Experience.

Ideas to Consider

Following are a few ideas to consider as you develop comments on this project:

- Are there any missing issues or concerns that should be addressed in the EA?
- Are there other options or information that you think should be considered?
- Do you have comments and suggestions for the parks to consider in their Fire Management Program?

How Do I Comment on This Project?

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website for all 3 parks:
<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/kimo>

Comments for all 3 parks may also be sent via email to:
liz_struhar@nps.gov

If you are unable to submit comments electronically, then you may submit written comments for all 3 parks to:

**Attention: Superintendent
Kings Mountain National Military Park
2625 Park Road
Blacksburg, SC 29702**

You may also hand-deliver written comments to the Kings Mountain National Military Park, Crowders Mountain State Park, or Kings Mountain State Park visitor centers, or the managers of those parks.

**Please provide all initial comments by
December 21, 2014**

If you cannot comment electronically, you may provide your comments/suggestions in the space provided below for consideration in the interagency Kings Mountain Parks Interagency Fire Management Plan EA process.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue or grey ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are approximately 20 lines visible. The paper has a slightly textured appearance and is set against a dark background.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment including your identifying information may be made publicly available.

CONTACT INFORMATION

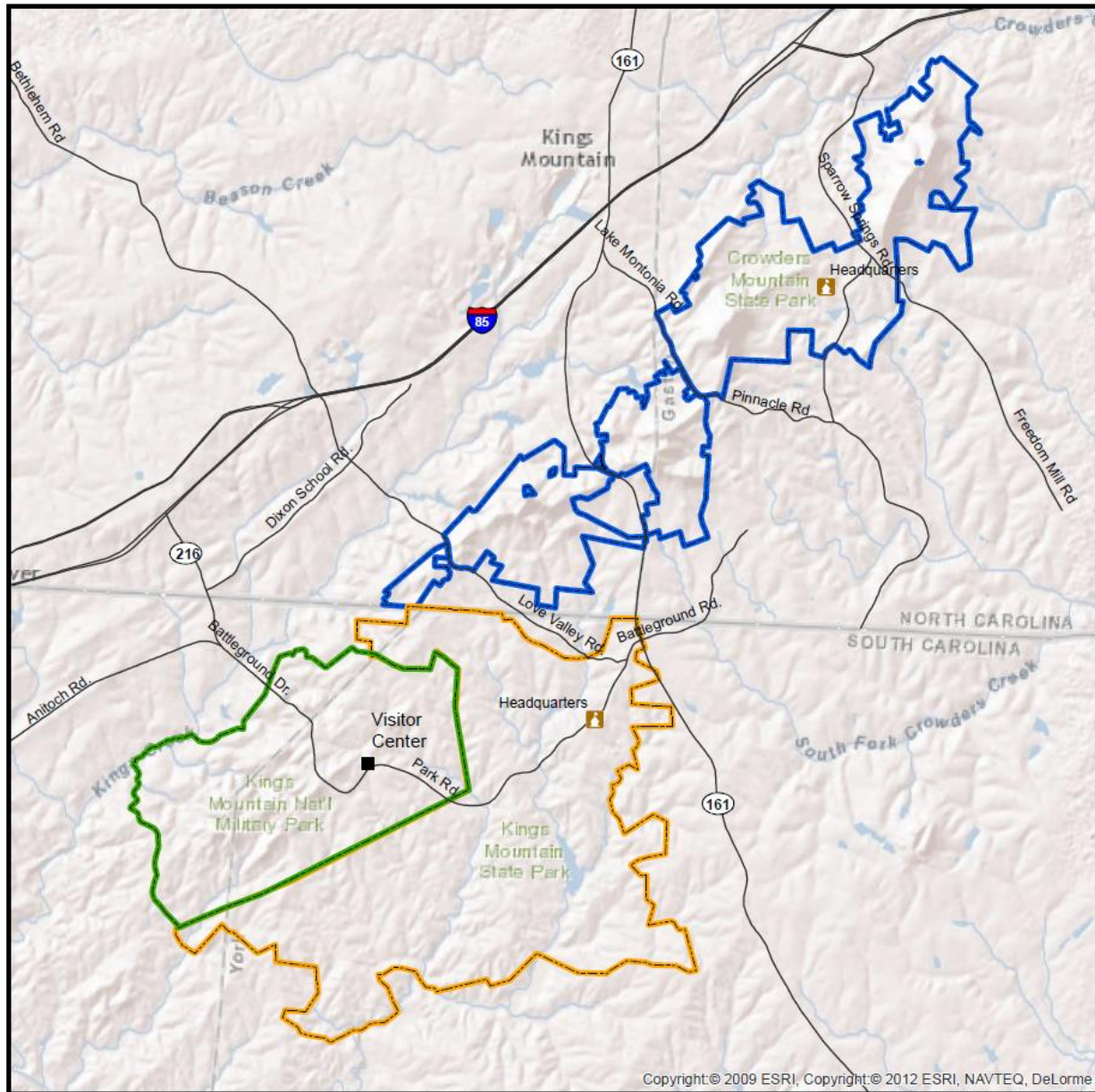
Name: _____ **Organization and Title:** _____

Mailing Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Daytime Phone (optional): _____ **Email address (optional):** _____

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Boundaries

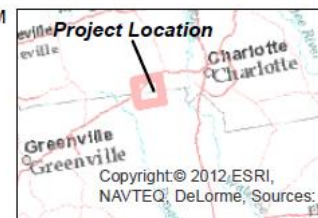
-  Kings Mountain National Military Park (~3,900 acres)
-  Kings Mountain State Park (~15,000 acres)
-  Crowders Mountain State Park (~5,000 acres)



1:87,000

Datum: NAD 83 17N UTM
DSC/October 2014

0 1.5 3 Miles



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