



Fire Management Plan and Environmental Assessment

Project Scoping for Environmental Assessment

July 11, 2016

The National Park Service is proposing to revise the 2003 Fire Management Plan for Fort Donelson National Battlefield (hereafter National Battlefield). The purpose of a revision is to add the use of additional fire management tools/strategies and incorporate battlefield lands acquired since the 2003 Fire Management Plan. The staff at the National Battlefield is preparing an environmental assessment, in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act, to analyze impacts to the environment for the proposed project. Public input and suggestions for fire management at the National Battlefield will be gathered and considered as part of this environmental assessment process.

Background

Fort Donelson National Battlefield was established in 1928 “for historical and professional military study” and to “preserve and interpret the historic battleground, including the nearby historic Surrender House” associated with the 1862 Civil War battle of Fort Donelson. The National Battlefield is a cultural landscape that contains contributing features, such as two river batteries along the Cumberland River, outer earthworks, the Surrender House (Dover Hotel), and the National Cemetery. More information regarding the fundamental purposes and guidance for management of the National Battlefield may be found in the 2009 Long-Range Interpretive Plan at <https://www.nps.gov/hfc/pdf/ip/fodo-lrip-2009.pdf>.

The current management of suppression of all wildfires and lack of a natural fire regime has resulted in the natural succession of forest stands with dense understories of elm, maple, and sweetgum. Historically, the vegetation consisted of mixed hardwood forests with a more open understory of grasses and forbs, and local agricultural fields. The dense forest stands have reduced the integrity of the historic cultural landscape within the National Battlefield by encroaching upon historic fields and obscuring the views and vistas that help a visitor to understand the conditions of the Battlefield in 1862 (i.e., topography and water sources). There is a need to restore, to protect, and to maintain the historic cultural landscape, reduce hazardous fuel loads, and to improve the health and vigor of the vegetation communities, while at the same time protecting visitors, employees, facilities, and adjacent private property.

Fire Management Goals

The National Battlefield plans to follow these broad goals in developing the revised fire management plan:

1. Prioritize protection of firefighters, staff, and the public in all fire management activities.
2. Facilitate the protection of park cultural resources, infrastructure, recreational values, other fundamental resource values, and the protection of adjacent private property from park wildland fires.
3. Restore, protect, and maintain historic cultural landscapes.
4. Reduce hazardous fuels to reduce the potential risk of high intensity wildfires.
5. Promote communication and cooperation on fire management activities between agencies and the public.

The National Battlefield resource managers will develop and list additional specific objectives under each of these goals as part of the fire management plan update process.

Alternatives Under Consideration

The following draft alternatives are based on the internal (staff) scoping discussions. Additional alternatives or changes to these alternatives may result from public comment and input.

Alternative A, the No Action Alternative would continue using the current fire management strategies/tools at the National Battlefield per the 2003 Fire Management Plan. The fire management strategies/tools used include suppressing all wildfires, mechanical/manual work along three sections of the National Battlefield perimeter that border private residences to reduce hazardous fuels and maintain fuel breaks, and mowing to maintain open park-like conditions.

Alternative B, Proposed Action includes all of the actions under Alternative A, and would add prescribed burning, limited mastication (wheeled or tracked equipment) and/or manual thinning for fuelbreaks and defensible space and ecological restoration, herbicide treatment to aid in maintenance of fuelbreaks and defensible space, and prescribed pile burning of slash material.

Steps in the Process

The basic steps of the planning process are as follows:

- The NPS team develops preliminary alternatives
- **Public scoping period (July 20 to August 20, 2016)**
- **Public scoping meeting, open house format**
August 3 from 5–7 PM at Stewart County Visitor Center
117 Visitors Center Lane, Dover, Tennessee 37058
- Refine alternatives based on public scoping comments
- Prepare the draft environmental assessment
- **Public review of the draft environmental assessment**
- Analysis of public comments
- Approval and release of the decision document and prepare fire management plan

***bold indicates formal opportunities for public comment**

Impact Topics Considered

The NPS uses impact topics as headings to help organize the discussion of environmental issues (e.g., specific problems, concerns, conflicts, obstacles, or benefits) and the environmental effects of alternatives under consideration in an environmental assessment. Internal scoping identified the following impact topics for consideration in the environmental assessment:

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Air Quality | Wildlife |
| Cultural Landscapes | Special Status Species |
| Archeological Resources | Human Health and Safety |
| Vegetation | |

Ideas to Consider

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

- Are there any other resources or issues that should be considered?
- Are there other alternatives that you think should be considered?
- Do you have any comments or suggestions that you think should be considered for the fire management program?

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/fodo>

You may submit written comments to:

**Superintendent
Fort Donelson National Battlefield
174 National Cemetery Drive
Dover, TN 37058**

You may also hand-deliver written comments to the National Battlefield Visitor Center.

All comments must be received by August 20, 2016.

