



Community and Infrastructure Protection Strategy: Amending Yosemite's Fire Management Plan

Yosemite National Park is updating its Fire Management Plan to incorporate changes to guidance on federal wildland fire policy. The updated plan will allow the park to make decisions based on science, weather, and local concerns rather than geographic zones.

Why update Yosemite's Fire Management Plan?

When Yosemite's Fire Management Plan was completed in 2004, federal wildland fire policy identified two types of wildfires - "fire use" for resource benefit objectives and "suppression" for protection objectives. The park used these definitions to "zone" the park into a Suppression Unit along the western border of the park where the majority of the communities and park infrastructure exists, and a Fire Use unit for the entire backcountry.

Federal Wildland Fire Policy Guidance issued in 2009 states that "the full range of strategic and tactical options is available and considered in response to every wildland fire." This policy change made the park's "suppression" and "fire use" zones obsolete and thus the park is proposing to rezone the park.

What is the park proposing?

The park is proposing to amend the Fire Management Plan to allow fire managers to apply the flexibility provided in the current federal guidance. The amendment would identify the full range of fire management options. Park managers will implement a Community Protection Strategy around the six wildland urban interface communities as well as other important infrastructure development in and adjacent to Yosemite (see attached map). The park anticipates completing a categorical exclusion per the National Environmental Policy Act to amend the 2004 plan, implementing the Community Protection Strategy in summer 2017.

With the proposed plan amendment, the park would retain the ability to take aggressive suppression action on any wildfire that has the potential to threaten life and property, human health (e.g., air quality), or natural and cultural resources.

How will this change the way Yosemite currently manages wildland fire?

The park will continue to:

- Put firefighter and public safety as our first priority in every fire management activity
- Protect our communities with mechanical thinning and prescribed fire
- Manage wildfires as an ecological process in Wilderness as much as possible.

This amendment will allow the park to better use fire to play a more beneficial role in reducing unnatural fuel buildup in areas that are at high risk for a future wildfire. On a yearly average, Yosemite is only able to achieve roughly 3,000 acres of treatment as opposed to the 16,000 acres that are recommended and analyzed in the 2004 Fire Management Plan Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). This amendment is intended to help us increase our desired EIS objectives.

The park will still use predetermined areas for prescribed fires but will now have the ability to use wildfires in areas where fires were previously suppressed. The full range of options (suppressing fires early but also allowing fires to play a beneficial role) will continue to be utilized. The use of wildfire to meet resource objectives will be determined on a case by case basis, taking into account fuel types, elevation, seasonal severity, and drought potential.

How will the drought, tree mortality, or past fires such as the 2013 Rim Fire affect the decision to amend the Fire Management Plan?

In the last few years, the Sierra Nevada region has experienced significant tree mortality, including portions of Yosemite especially in the lower elevations. Under this proposed amendment, the park will have an increased opportunity to use fire to achieve resource objectives when the appropriate environmental conditions exist. For example, the park may use wildfire to allow areas to burn in an effort to reduce dense stands of mortality.

The 2013 Rim Fire burned 78,893 acres inside the park, the majority burned in Wilderness. A recent fire of this size lowers the risk of future large fires in this landscape as well as risks to health, safety, and natural and cultural resources. This is an ideal time to change the Fire Management Plan and take advantage of the recent Rim Fire burned area. By amending the plan, the park would be able to use fire as a resource management tool to treat additional acres that would have otherwise been suppressed. In areas of the park where fires have been routinely suppressed, the park will use fire, if the appropriate conditions exist, to help achieve the park's resource management goals.

What are the benefits of the Community and Infrastructure Protection Strategy?

The proposed change allows the park to conform to current federal wildland fire policy and provides an increased opportunity to restore natural fire to the Wilderness. This plan amendment will allow the park to better use fire to play a beneficial role in reducing unnatural fuel buildup in areas that are at high risk for a future wildfire and to meet desired resource objectives. On average, Yosemite is only able to achieve roughly a third of the recommended treated acreage identified in its current Fire Management Plan. By using the best available science and technology and adhering to adaptive management principles, the park will be able to make more informed decisions about how, when, and where the park restores wildfire on our landscapes.

The six Wildland Urban Interface communities in the park (El Portal, Foresta, Wawona, Yosemite West, Hodgdon, and Yosemite Valley) will continue to be our highest priorities of protection which will guide the park's Community and Infrastructure Protection Strategy into the future.

How can I get involved?

- Comment online through July 15 at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/YOSEFMPamend>.
- Submit a written comment postmarked by July 15, 2017, to:
Superintendent
Attn: *FMP Amendment*
P.O. Box 577
Yosemite, CA 95389
- [Add your name to the park's planning list](#) to receive periodic planning-related electronic notices on this and other park projects.



Wildland Urban Interface communities will continue to be prioritized for hazardous fuels reduction treatments like this prescribed fire in Wawona.