

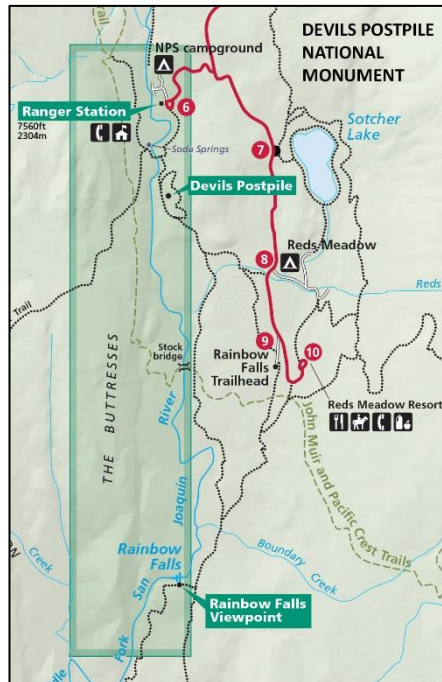


Purpose and Need/Background

The National Park Service (NPS) is proposing to update the Fire Management Plan (FMP) for Devils Postpile National Monument west of Mammoth Lakes, CA. In conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), we are initiating the public scoping period, an early step in the planning process. We are soliciting input from the public on the proposed scope of the environmental assessment (EA) that we will be preparing for the FMP. Information on how you can provide scoping input to the NPS, including attending a public scoping meeting on January 17, 2018 in Mammoth Lakes, is explained on back of this announcement.

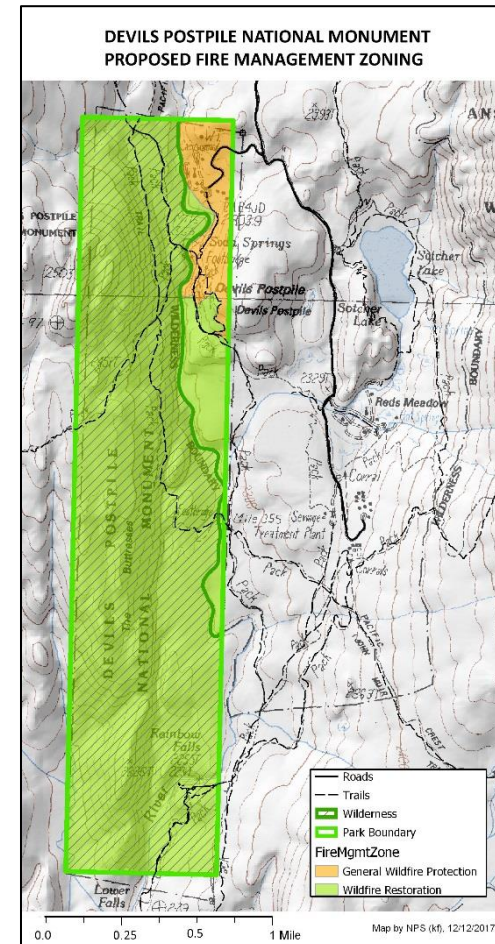
The purpose of the FMP update is to more effectively respond to the current high fuel loading conditions in the Monument and reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfire occurring. Twenty five years ago, the 1992 Rainbow Fire burned 82% of the Monument (more than 25% experienced high severity fire). In 2011, the Devils Windstorm uprooted thousands of large diameter trees. These events, along with over a century of fire suppression, have increased fuel loading, increased cover of shrubs, decreased forest canopy and altered forest composition.

The proposed FMP update would address wildfire and fuels management throughout the Monument, including strategies for the suppression of unwanted wildfires, the management of some wildfires for multiple objectives including resource benefit, and the implementation of prescribed



fire and mechanical treatment projects to achieve protection and resource objectives.

The 2005 FMP does not allow for either prescribed fire or fuel treatments in the Wilderness area of the Monument or for the management of unplanned ignitions for multiple objectives, including resource benefits. During the past century, the suppression of fires in the Monument has been so successful



that when wildfires do occur, such as in 1992, fire severity is higher due to the accumulation of fuels. With higher severity, more mature trees are killed, preventing or largely suppressing forest regeneration and increasing damage to soil integrity, river water quality, wildlife diversity and the public's recreational experience. There is a need to re-establish the natural fire regime (historical average of 14-18 years between fires) while at the same time, protecting visitors and facilities in the Monument, in the adjacent Forest Service lands and communities and resorts to the east.

Proposed Zoning

The NPS proposed zoning for the updated FMP would create two fire management zones based on the adjacent US Forest Service zone definitions.

The General Wildfire Protection Zone (shown in orange) is the

area of the park at high risk from wildfire damage due to the concentration of visitors and facilities. The NPS proposes to use mechanical fuels treatments and/or prescribed fire to reduce fuels and lower the risk of wildfire damage. On a very limited basis, wildfire could be used to provide ecological benefits to habitat in this zone.

The zoning proposed for the majority of the Monument would be Wildfire Restoration Zone (shown in green). In this zone, the fire management priority is to promote more natural ecological structure and function of the forests while protecting isolated assets that are at low risk. In this zone, much of which is federally-designed Wilderness (green areas that are lightly hatched), the response to wildfire would be commensurate with its potential risk, effects, and benefits. Wildfire could be used to increase ecosystem resilience and resistance to climate change, air pollution, insect infestations and subsequent high severity wildfires. Prescribed fire would be used to reduce risk of damage from wildfire and restore natural fuel and fire regime conditions. In some locations, mechanical treatments would focus on thinning of small diameter trees and piling dead and downed woody debris prior to burning.

The NPS will be preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to analyze the effects of the proposed FMP update on the human and natural environment and provide an opportunity for public input in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).

Overview of the NPS NEPA Planning Process

(**Bold text** indicates current step in the planning process.)

Step 1. Define objectives and formulate concepts for alternatives

Step 2. Initiate public scoping (closes February 16, 2018)

Step 3. Refine alternatives and analyze environmental impacts

Step 4. Prepare Draft Environmental Assessment

Step 5. Public review of Draft Environmental Assessment

Step 6. Analysis of public comments

Step 7. Release Decision Document

Step 8. Prepare Fire Management Plan

Proposed Alternatives to be Evaluated

No Action Alternative: Under this alternative, the park would maintain the status quo with regard to wildland fire management and the 2005 Fire Management Plan would not be revised/updated.

Proposed Alternative: Revise/Update the Fire Management Plan to zone the Monument into a General Wildfire Protection Zone and a Wildfire Restoration Zone. The use of wildfire for multiple objectives would be available as a potential resource management tool especially in the Wildfire

Restoration Zone. Under the Proposed Alternative, both prescribed fire and mechanical treatments could be used in both zones to reduce the risk of a high severity wildfire and to restore a more natural fire regime in Devils Postpile National Monument.

Resources and Issues

NPS staff preliminarily identified the following impact topics for consideration in the Environmental Assessment for the Fire Management Plan:

Air Quality	Recreation
Archeological Resources	Special Status Species
Historic Resources	Vegetation
Wilderness Character	Public Safety
Wildlife and Wildlife Habitat	Soils/Water Quality

Scoping Questions for the Public to Consider:

1. Are there specific issues or questions that should be examined in the EA?
2. Are there other impact topics that should be included in the EA?
3. Are there other alternative strategies that should be considered for fire management planning at Devils Postpile National Monument?

Please submit scoping comments on the proposed Fire Management Plan Update by February 16, 2018.

There are 3 ways to submit your comments:

1. At the Fire Management Plan Update public scoping open house to be held at the Public Library in Mammoth Lakes from 3:30 pm to 6:30 pm on January 17, 2018.
2. Through the NPS Planning, Environment and Public Comment website: parkplanning.nps.gov/depo (select FMP Update)
3. By mail to: Superintendent, Devils Postpile NM
NPS POB 3999, Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546

Will there be other opportunities to comment on the project?

Yes. The Environmental Assessment for the FMP will be made available for public review and a public meeting will be held during the public review period.

If you wish to be added to the park's mailing list for this and other announcements, please indicate that when you comment.