

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN
GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
COCONINO COUNTY, ARIZONA

Abstract This Final Environmental Impact Statement and Assessment of Effect for the Fire Management Plan describes and analyzes alternatives for the management of fire activities and responses in Grand Canyon National Park. For the purpose of this analysis, the Fire Management Plan Final Environmental Impact Statement/Assessment of Effect (FMP FEIS/AEF) compares the No Action Alternative, which represents Grand Canyon's existing fire management program, to four action alternatives. Each action alternative is a separate proposal for managing hazardous fuels and restoring fire to park ecosystems. Action alternatives differ in combination and implementation of strategies used to accomplish the plan's goals and objectives.

Alternative 1 (No Action) continues the existing Fire Management Program including fire suppression, wildland fire-use, prescribed fire, and limited manual fuel-reduction treatments in three existing Fire Management Units (FMU).

Alternative 2, Mixed Fire Treatment Program (Preferred Alternative), resembles the No Action Alternative but uses newly defined Fire Management Units and includes suppression, wildland fire-use, and prescribed fires and non-fire treatments with additional options of mechanical and manual hazard-fuel treatment techniques. The focus of Alternative 2 is on restoring and maintaining park ecosystems with prescribed and wildland fire-use and reducing hazard fuels in Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) areas using prescribed fire and non-fire treatments.

Alternative 3, Non-Fire Treatment Emphasis, combines suppression, wildland fire-use, and prescribed fires, and mechanical and manual hazard-fuel reduction techniques. The focus of Alternative 3 is on fuel-reduction projects in the WUI to reduce wildfire hazards to park communities and values at risk. Prescribed fire would focus on the WUI, and fire use would occur when fire management staff can manage a fire without reducing WUI operations.

Alternative 4, Prescribed Fire Emphasis, combines suppression, wildland fire-use, and prescribed fires, and mechanical and manual hazard-fuel reduction techniques. The focus of Alternative 4 is on restoring park ecosystems with prescribed fire to desired conditions prior to managing fire in those areas with wildland fire-use. Wildland fire use would only occur in areas that meet desired-condition criteria. Non-fire treatments and prescribed fire would occur in WUI areas.

Alternative 5, Fire Use Emphasis, combines suppression, wildland fire-use, and prescribed fires, and mechanical and manual hazard-fuel reduction techniques. The focus of Alternative 5 is on restoring park ecosystems and maintaining historic fire regimes through wildland fire-use management. Protection of WUI and values at risk occur through prescribed fire and non-fire treatments.

In addition to the summary above, elements common to all Action Alternatives (2-5) include

- Grand Canyon National Park is divided into eight new Fire Management Units
- WUI treatment areas and priorities do not change, but implementation pace varies by alternative
- Wildland fire-use would not be used as a management tool in the two WUI FMU
- Highway 64 and Highway 67 are not classified in either WUI FMU but these roads and their corridors are primary public escape routes and would be included as areas where mechanical/manual thinning is

proposed. For project planning and funding purposes, work associated with these road corridors (300 feet from road centerline) would be designated WUI projects

- It is anticipated that up to 80% of proposed thinning projects would be completed under contracted services (using local or regional resources)
- Mechanical treatments are proposed for the Primary WUI FMU only
- Increased allowance of high and moderate/high severity in mixed-conifer compared to the No Action Alternative. A mitigation addressing increased high and moderate/high severity states: "Assess the amount of moderate/high and high severity fire through composite burn index monitoring after each managed fire in the mixed-conifer vegetation type above the rim. Use the adaptive management process to adjust burn prescription, ignition pattern, burn seasonality, and/or pre-treatment to ensure no more than 30% of the mixed-conifer vegetation type and MSO mixed-conifer restricted habitat burns with moderate/high and high severity. This includes high and moderate/high fire severity from past fires (2000 to present) (Table 4-15a), and all fires that will occur within the scope of this planning document." The allowance of 30% high and moderate/high severity is not meant to be a target, but is a maximum amount. The park has described tools for planned and unplanned fires that will help keep the level of high and moderate/high severity to a minimum
- The adaptive management process will be used during the planning, implementation, and review process for each fire event with the intent that more tools can be developed to continue to minimize high and moderate/high fire severity effects

Potential environmental consequences of each alternative are evaluated for a range of impact topics including: Vegetation, Special Status Plant Species, Exotic Plants, Wildlife, Special Status Wildlife Species, Cultural Resources, Air Quality, Soils and Watersheds, Soundscapes, Wilderness Character, Visitor Experience, Socioeconomics, and Park Management and Operations.

A 30-day no-action period will follow publication of a Notice of Availability of this Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the Federal Register. Unlike other Federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management, the National Park Service (NPS) does not have a public comment period or a formal appeals process for Federal actions described in a FEIS. The NPS accepts public comments during the public comment period for the Draft EIS, and addresses them in the Final EIS. Following the 30-day no-action period, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be prepared that documents the NPS decision and rationale for that decision. The ROD will be released to the public, and a summary published in the Federal Register.

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