

Wilderness Awareness Workshop

# Case Study Discussion - Fire

**1. Issue:** During fire suppressionand wildland fire use activities there may be a need to take action that creates impacts on the wilderness resource for fire line, spike and coyote camps, water sources, and helispots and for the use of motorized equipment such as chain saws and pumps, and also for the use and landing of helicopters.

In emergency suppression situations, wildland fire use operations, and pre-planned prescribed fire projects there is a need to determine if any management action is necessary and if so, what the minimum necessary requirement is before requesting approval for the use of any method or tool generally prohibited by The Wilderness Act.

**2. Situation:**

**a. Suppression:** The decision has been made to suppress this fire in wilderness**.** The fire is not controlled and the perimeter is still expanding.The division has been directed to control the east side of the fire using indirect, flanking procedures. The area is partially timbered, moderate and steep slopes with small and medium sized natural openings (dry grass meadows), and small creeks. Several trails access the area which is about 5 miles from the nearest trailhead. The Incident Action Plan indicates two historic cabins in the area and the creeks are habitat for listed fish species. The tasks will include the following:

* locate and, if necessary, construct fireline
* find a spike camp location
* determine the best methods for supplying the spike camp and suppression operations
* locate, and if necessary construct, helispots

**b. Wildland fire use for resource benefits:** A fire management plan has been approved for this forest which allows for wildland fire use in the wilderness. As part of the wildland fire use planning process a ‘minimum requirements decision tree’ will be developed to guide decisions on the location and use of motorized equipment, aircraft, spike camps, and hand line. Your tasks as part of the planning team will include the following:

* develop criteria for the use of motorized equipment and aircraft
* develop criteria and identify potential spike camp locations
* list rationale, in priority order, for the use of various fire control techniques such as hand line, wet line, aircraft, burn out, natural openings, water sources, etc.

**3. Management Question(s):**

* What is different about fire management in wilderness vs. non-wilderness lands? What is the same?
* What are your overriding concerns for fire management activities in wilderness?
* What techniques, tools, and methods can be used to insure that degradation of the wilderness resource is minimized?

**4. Direction/Guidance:**

**a. What does the Wilderness Act and subsequent legislation say?**

SECTION 2.(a) and these shall be administered for the use and enjoyment of the American people in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness, and so as to provide for the protection of these areas, the preservation of their wilderness character…”

**DEFINITION OF WILDERNESS**

(c) A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.

**PROHIBITION OF CERTAIN USES**

(c) Except as specifically provided for in this Act, and subject to existing private rights, there shall be no commercial enterprise and no permanent road within any wilderness area designated by this Act and except as necessary to meet minimum requirements for the administration of the area for the purpose of this Act (including measures required in emergencies involving the health and safety of persons within the area), there shall be no temporary road, no use of motor vehicles, motorized equipment or motorboats, no landing of aircraft, no other form of mechanical transport, and no structure or installation within any such area.

**SPECIAL PROVISIONS**

(d) The following special provisions are hereby made:

(1) Within wilderness areas designated by this Act the use of aircraft or motorboats, where these uses have already become established, may be permitted to continue subject to such restrictions as the Secretary of Agriculture deems desirable. In addition, **such measure may be taken as may be necessary in the control of fire**, insects, and diseases, subject to such conditions as the Secretary deems desirable.

**b. What is your agency policy?**

2324.2 - Management of Fire

2324.21 - Objectives. The objectives of fire management in wilderness are to:

1. Permit lightning caused fires to play, as nearly as possible, their natural ecological role within wilderness.

2. Reduce, to an acceptable level, the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.

2324.22 - Policy

1. Two types of prescribed fires may be approved for use within wilderness: those ignited by lightning and allowed to burn under prescribed conditions and those ignited by qualified Forest Service officers.

2. No fire may be ignited or allowed to burn without documented, preplanned, specified conditions.

3. Document specific objectives, standards, and guidelines for the control of wildfire and the use of prescribed fire within each wilderness (FSM 5100, 5150, and 5190) in a forest plan or, where the forest planning process has not been completed, in either an interim wilderness management or fire management area plan. Document specific direction for fire program implementation in the forest fire management action plan (FSH 5109.19).

4. Suppress all wildfires within wilderness in accordance with the direction FSM 5130.

5. Fire ignited by lightning may be permitted to burn if prescribed in an approved plan (FSM 2324 and 5150).

6. Forest Service managers may ignite a prescribed fire in wilderness to reduce unnatural buildups of fuels only if necessary to meet at least one of the wilderness fire management objectives set forth in FSM 2324.21 and if all of the following conditions are met:

a. The use of prescribed fire or other fuel treatment measures outside of wilderness is not sufficient to achieve fire management objectives within wilderness.

b. An interdisciplinary team of resource specialists has evaluated and recommended the proposed use of prescribed fire.

c. The interested public has been involved appropriately in the decision.

d. Lightning-caused fires cannot be allowed to burn because they will pose serious threats to life and/or property within wilderness or to life, property, or natural resources outside of wilderness.

7. Do not use prescribed fire in wilderness to benefit wildlife, maintain vegetative types, improve forage production, or enhance other resource values. Although these additional effects may result from a decision to use prescribed fire, use fire in wilderness only to meet wilderness fire management objectives.

8. Do not use management ignited fire to achieve wilderness fire management objectives where lightning-caused fires can achieve them.

2324.23 - Fire Management Activities. Conduct all fire management activities within wilderness in a manner compatible with overall wilderness management objectives. Give preference to using methods and equipment that cause the least:

1. Alteration of the wilderness landscape.

2. Disturbance of the land surface.

3. Disturbance to visitor solitude.

4. Reduction of visibility during periods of visitor use.

5. Adverse effect on other air quality related values.

Locate fire camps, helispots, and other temporary facilities or improvements outside of the wilderness boundary whenever feasible. Rehabilitate disturbed areas within wilderness to as natural an appearance as possible.

**c. What does your forest plan or wilderness plan say?**

**5. What are your management options?**

Remember to split this minimum requirements decision making process into two parts:

Step 1 – Is any administrative action necessary?

Step 2 – If action is necessary, what is the minimum tool/method that will cause the least

degradation of the wilderness resource and character?

Step 1: Is administrative action necessary? \_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

Discuss *why* fire management measures (such as suppression or prescribed fire) may be necessary.

Based on an analysis of law, agency policy, other valid rights, and possible other non-wilderness mitigations of the problem, is it necessary to take **any** management action in wilderness to address the issue and resolve the problem?

\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO Why?

If the answer is NO, stop the minimum requirements analysis here.

If the answer is YES, summarize the rationale and proceed to Step 2 of the MRDG.

**a. Suppression**: What factors are considered before making a decision to suppress fire in wilderness?

**b. Wildland fire use**: What factors are considered before approving wildland fire use in wilderness?

Step 2: If the answer to Step 1 is YES and you have determined that some administrative action is necessary, then discuss the following alternatives and others that your group develops to minimize degradtion of the wilderness resource:

a. **Suppression**:

* What strategies, tactics, and techniques can be used to minimize impacts but accomplish

suppression objectives?

* List alternative approaches that include specific use of motorized equipment and locations of

camps, helispots, and line.

1.

2.

3.

b. **Wildland fire use**:

* How can this project be planned to minimize human caused impacts on the wilderness?
* What techniques can be utilized to minimize impacts?
* List alternatives including specific tactics and techniques

1.

2.

3.

**6. What is your decision? And, w**hat mitigation measures are necessary?

1. **Suppression:**
2. **Wildland fire use:**

**7. What is the rationale for your decision?**

The rationale should link the decision made to wilderness management objectives, law, policy, forest plan standards and guidelines, etc. and explain how this decision best protects the wilderness character while addressing the problem in a feasible manner.

1. **Suppression:**

Is it the minimum necessary? Why?

1. **Wildland fire use:**

Is it the minimum necessary? Why?

**8. What additional constraints are necessary to minimize disturbance to the wilderness resource and character?**

Timing, location, or frequency of activity?

Maintenance requirements?

Standards or design requirements?

Monitoring?