



# NATIONAL FIRE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY PARKS CANADA AGENCY



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## Approval Page

**Prepared by:**

National Fire Management Committee

**Reviewed by:**

**Original signed by:  
Per Nilsen for:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Rob Prosper  
Chief, Ecosystem Protection

**March 23<sup>rd</sup> 2005**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Recommended by:**

**Original signed by:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nik Lopoukhine  
Director General  
National Parks Directorate

**April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Approved by:**

**Original signed by:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Alan Latourelle  
Chief Executive Officer  
Parks Canada Agency

**April 7<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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## INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

Fire management within the National Parks of Canada and throughout the world has evolved from attempting to remove fire from the landscape to using of fire to meet specific ecosystem conservation objectives. Managers of fire-prone landscapes now recognize the need for the maintenance or restoration of fire through active management to enhance ecological integrity and reduce overall fire risk. This was a major conclusion of a 1999 IUCN workshop on public policies affecting forest fires.

In 1986, Parks Canada developed Management Directive 2.4.4, through which it implemented fire management. In 1989, Parks Canada adopted the recommendations in *Keepers of the Flame* (Canadian Parks Service 1989) as its national fire management strategy. The key program direction was to

***provide good fire control and a phased approach to fire use through the implementation of a fire resource-sharing program.***

The Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks recommended that, in appropriate parks, Parks Canada actively manage to restore fire, within an adaptive management framework, to 50 per cent of the long-term fire cycle. In response, Parks Canada committed, subject to funding availability, to pursue this national goal (Parks Canada Agency 2001).

The Parks Canada Agency recognized that factors such as climate change, increased incidence of wildfires, increased use of prescribed fire, and fuel management needs, have contributed to the requirement for program review and update. A review of the Parks Canada Agency's approach to fire management was carried out with senior managers in January of 2004. An analysis of the national fire management program (Parks Canada Agency 2004a) was used to guide the discussions.

This revised National Fire Management Strategy sets the strategic direction for fire management for the next 15 years. It is the basis for revisions to Management Directive 2.4.4 and the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for fire management in Canada's national parks and national historic sites.

## PROGRAM STATUS

The strategic direction provided by *Keepers of the Flame* has served the Agency well; however, many internal and external changes have affected the Agency necessitating an update to the strategy.

While the level of resources allocated to the fire management program has remained constant over the years, the professionalism of Parks Canada's firefighters, crew leaders, fire manager's, and communicators has increased steadily over the past 20 years due to an organization that has endorsed and supported broadening of training and experience. The Agency's personnel are working collaboratively with their peers from other agencies at all levels in training, planning, science and fire management implementation initiatives. Acceptance by other organizations is perhaps the most easily identified recognition of this growing professionalism. Effective communications both internally and externally has been important to the Agency's success in implementing fire management.

Despite the improvements in efficiency and effectiveness within the fire management program, it is clear that attaining 50 percent of the long-term fire cycle is not feasible. A modified overall program goal of 20 percent of the long-term fire cycle will be utilized under the current strategy. Management of resources must recognize the expected increase in wildfire occurrence and continuing uncertainty in emergency response funding.

## VISION

Over the next 15 years, Parks Canada will build on the key direction provided by *Keepers of the Flame*. The Agency will move from a reactive to a pro-active fire management program. The program will be nationally cohesive and fully integrated with the other functions of the Agency. It is based on clear accountabilities and sound business planning principles. It will have a landscape focus and will engage Canadians in its development and delivery. Professional staff at the National Office, Service Centre and Field Unit level will support the program.

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following principles provide a foundation for the Agency's fire management program.

1. Public and fire fighter safety is the first concern of all fire management actions.
2. National parks and historic sites with fire dependent ecosystems will recognize the role of fire in restoring or maintaining ecological integrity and biodiversity.
3. The Park/Site Management Plan directs the overall fire management program through fire management plans and vegetation management objectives.
4. Management decisions will support the role of fire in the ecosystem, while mitigating wildfire and ecological risks.
5. Communication strategies (including public consultation, education, and media relations) focus on engaging neighbours, communities, and stakeholders to build awareness and support for fire management program and decisions.
6. Fire is managed using the best available scientific knowledge and the principle of adaptive management.
7. Fire is managed on a landscape basis having regard to the goals and objectives of neighbours.
8. The fire management program is sustainable and based on sound business planning principles.
9. Parks Canada operates an integrated fire organization that utilizes staff who have a range of duties as well as employees solely dedicated to fire management.
10. Fire management planning is integrated with other Parks Canada Agency functions.
11. Fire management is integrated with other Canadian Fire Management Agencies

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The following strategic direction is an elaboration of the program vision and is the basis for achieving the Agency's overall national target of 20 percent<sup>1</sup> of the long-term fire cycle

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<sup>1</sup> Several parks, particularly in the mountains, have a goal of 50% of the historic fire cycle approved in their Park Management Plans. These are obligations notwithstanding the national goal of 20%.

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## National Fire Management Strategy – Parks Canada Agency

In the governance, planning, delivery, and monitoring of the fire management program Parks Canada will:

1. Ensure an appropriate response to wildfire and a phased approach to fire use through national fire inter-agency and intra-agency resource sharing.
2. Maintain a professional and sustainable fire management capacity.
3. Move from a dependency on emergency response to a strategy of preparedness and risk reduction.
4. Increase through adaptive management the use of fire and fuel management.
5. Seek opportunities for professional and technical development and retention of staff.
6. Maintaining existing and, as funding permits; enhance capacity in areas of fire management identified as a priority.
7. Promote landscape level fire management with neighbours.
8. Engage local and regional communities and public in the development of fire management strategies.
9. Ensure that fire and vegetation management monitoring are based on measurable objectives and integrated with the national monitoring framework.
10. Maintain a strong fire science and technology capacity integrated into the Agency's Science Strategy.
11. Strengthen the relationship and sense of common purpose with central emergency funding agencies.

## IMPLEMENTING THE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Maintaining a National Focus

The fire management program will continue to have a national focus. This will be achieved through:

- national planning and priority setting for prescribed fire and wildfire resource deployments;
- national coordination by a National Fire Management Committee (NFMC);
- a National Fire Centre (NFC) with components in the National Office, Service Centres, and Field Units;
- implementing a national communications strategy;
- a continued emphasis on sharing of resources from across Canada;
- an updated national management directive; and
- up-to-date national SOPs.

### Governance And Accountability

#### Roles, Responsibilities and Accountability

##### *Program Management*

The Director General, National Parks Directorate is the senior manager with overall accountability for the national fire management program, including national human resource strategies, planning and priority setting, and program implementation and reporting.

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***Field Unit/Site Superintendent***

The Field Unit/Site Superintendent has the overall accountability for the field unit/site fire management program and for supporting the national fire management priorities through the implementation of the National Fire Management Plan. Meeting these program accountabilities must include using the technical and professional support in fire management provided by the national fire center.

***National Fire Centre***

The NFC is composed of the national (NFC-O), eastern (NFC-E) and western (NFC-W) fire offices. Functional leadership through setting national program priorities for the fire management program, including fire science, is provided by the NFC-O. The Ecosystem Manager in the respective service centres provides program management related to service centre resources, functional and administrative supervision of personnel in the NFC-W and NFC-E offices.

National duty officer responsibilities will be shared within an active roster of fire management officers. Anyone functioning as the national duty officer will report to the Chief, Resource Protection during his or her tour of duty and will represent the operational face of the National Parks Directorate.

***National Fire Management Committee***

The NFMC reports to the Director General, National Parks Directorate and is responsible for providing the overall strategic coordination of the national fire management program.

**Planning and Priority Setting**

Field Unit/Site Superintendents are accountable for ensuring that fire management plans are developed based on approved ecological/cultural objectives and wildfire risk identified in the park/site management plan in consultation with communities and neighbouring jurisdictions. They are accountable for developing, reviewing, and approving prescribed fire and fuel management plans. Finally, they are accountable for setting field level priorities for implementing prescribed fire and fuel management plans.

Individual park/site prescribed fire programs are planned at the local level and implemented as part of a three year National Fire Management Plan. They must also be consistent with direction from Park/Site Management Plans and Community Plans and be included in the Field Unit/Site Business Plan.

The National Fire Management Plan is prepared under the guidance of the NFMC. It is approved by the Director General, National Parks Directorate and governs the operation of the national fire management program. It also sets the priorities and resource allocations for the annual prescribed fire program which are also approved by the National Finance Committee.

**RESOURCE SHARING**

Sharing specialized resources nationally is another key to the success of the Parks Canada Agency fire management program. The Agency will continue with this model of intra-agency resource sharing.

The Agency will develop and share expertise in fire use with the broader fire management community.

**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**

SOPs will be used to ensure consistency in program delivery and an appropriate level of employee health and safety. The National Occupation Safety and Health Committee will review SOPs that have health and safety implications.

**RISK REDUCTION AND ECOLOGICAL INTEGRITY**

To enhance the protection of identified values-at-risk from wildfire while maintaining and restoring the ecological role of fire, increased emphasis will be placed on prescribed fire and fuel management. Priority prescribed fire and fuel management areas will be identified in park/site fire management plans. Fuel Management

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## National Fire Management Strategy – Parks Canada Agency

implementation should not rely solely on public funding, but rather seek innovative ways to use private sources such as partnerships with businesses operating in parks/sites or communities (e.g., *FireSmart* program).

### **ACHIEVING A SUSTAINABLE PROGRAM**

#### **Fire Finance**

- (a) The Agency will strive to achieve a sustainable fire management program based on predictable funding levels and sources. It will continue to rely on emergency funding from central agencies for the reduction of wildfire risk, suppression and rehabilitation. The fire management planning process will direct the investment of fiscal and human resources and will focus on capacity building and the strategic sharing of specialized resources.
- (b) The Vote 120 (Emergency Funding) Operating Rules (June 1995) should be reviewed to reflect the present fire management goals and the blend that exists between ecological and wildfire risk reduction goals.
- (c) An important relationship exists between fuel management and wildfire risk reduction, the latter relating to facility protection and wildfire suppression. Fuel management programs intended primarily to enhance facility protection and wildfire suppression should be funded from emergency funding.
- (d) Ecological Integrity funding will be used to enhance capacity in relation to the ecological use of fire.
- (e) Through the national fire management planning process, the fire program will integrate the use of other funding sources (e.g. enveloped funding and revenue).
- (f) Efforts will be made to strengthen the relationship with central funding agencies.

#### **Human Resources Management**

##### ***Training and Succession Planning***

- (a) Resource mobility is limited by the number of employees properly trained in all areas of fire management (e.g., fire practitioners, communications specialists, fire finance, etc.). Mobility will be enhanced by training sufficient staff in eastern, western and northern Canada to respond to system-wide needs
- (b) New Incident Management Team (IMT) members will be recruited, trained, and certified to replace existing IMT members lost through attrition or transfer. New recruits will be integrated into IMT team rotations to provide experience under the mentoring of experienced team members.
- (c) Staff accepting IMT responsibilities will receive appropriate training and recognition for their contribution to the fire management program.

#### **Program Integration**

The fire monitoring program contributes to the national monitoring framework. Resources allocated for monitoring will take into account the monitoring needs of the fire management program.

Fire management efforts are integrated with the work of other agencies engaged in fire science and technology. Developing stronger relationships with other funding agencies such as the National Science and Engineering Research Council will contribute to fulfilling the research needs of the fire management program.

Other Agency functions (e.g., communications, asset management and visitor services) will contribute to an effective fire management program and an informed public. This functional integration will be a cornerstone of both fire planning and implementation.

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## **ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT**

The fire management program will be managed in an adaptive way by acting, monitoring and responding to changes in technical, ecological, economic, and socio-political management indicators.

## **STRATEGY REVIEW**

This strategy will be reviewed five years from the date of approval or as circumstances require.

## **SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS OF STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT**

A strategic environmental assessment (Parks Canada Agency 2004b) of this national strategy was conducted in accordance with the Cabinet Directive on the Environmental Assessment of Policy, Plan and Program Proposals and the Parks Canada Agency Management Directive 2.4.2 (Environmental Impact Assessment).

The assessment concluded that, overall, a strategic direction that emphasizes a pro-active use of fire under controlled conditions that will result in a reduced reliance on wildfire suppression will have a long-term beneficial affect. Short-term and localized impacts can be assessed and mitigated through project level assessments. Developing and implementing a regime of best practices that uses state-of-the-art technology for suppression can minimize impacts of wildfire occurrences.

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