

UTAH WILDLAND FIRE USE

Wildland Fire Use is the management of lightning fires to achieve resource benefit where fire is a major component of the ecosystem. It allows fire to play its natural role of enhancing many natural resource values while still protecting private property and social values. Social and cultural approaches to wildland fire over the past century have focused on preventing and suppressing fires. We continue to learn and now have a more complete understanding of the essential role fire plays in our environment.

These fires create vegetative diversity such as a mixture of wildlife habitats while eliminating heavy fuel accumulation. Over time, the continued use of wildland fire can reduce the damage from wildfires and the costs of fire management. It also protects plants and animals that depend on fire by improving habitats and watersheds.

Traditionally wildland fire use was a wilderness program; however, as a result of fire policy changes the program has been expanded. In October of 2000, the Utah Fire Amendment was completed. This amended the Forest Plans for all six Utah National Forests. Part of the purpose of this amendment was to add significant portions of National Forest lands where wildland fire use could be allowed and managed under the right conditions.

Wildland fire use events are actively managed. Detailed plans are prepared once an ignition has been evaluated and approved as a wildland fire use fire. All of the tools and tactics used for suppressing fires are available for managing wildland fire use as necessary and appropriate. However, as much as possible, fire is allowed to play its natural role. Fire management programs are designed based on a balance of needs including fire suppression, prevention and wildland fire use. There will always be a need for prevention and suppression to protect people and communities. Partnerships with state, federal and local agencies play a critical role in all of fire management.

2004 wildland fire use events in Utah include the Pine Park WFU of 2800 acres on the Dixie NF, the Link WFU of 159 acres, the Cove Creek WFU of 18 acres and the Six Mile WFU of 2552 acres all on the Manti-Lasal NF, and the Razorback WFU of 223 acres on the Fishlake NF.

Costs to manage fires under a wildland fire use strategy averaged around \$40 per acre both regionally and nationally in 2003. The program for the entire Intermountain Region was over 15,000 acres in 2003 and is over 30,000 acres so far in 2004.