



**BC Parks**

## **BC Parks: Wildfire management**

Wildfire is a natural force of nature throughout British Columbia. Historically, it has played a major role in shaping the province's rich diversity of forests and grasslands.

Although fires are natural and provide ecological benefits, they must be monitored if they occur in parks. They can be allowed to burn only if they are in a remote area of a large park and represent limited risk to the park or values in adjacent areas, or if control actions are limited by a lack of access or concerns for wildfire fighter safety.

As stewards of British Columbia's parks and protected areas, BC Parks must maintain natural ecosystems while protecting public safety and values in adjacent areas. Fire management in parks strives to reunite fire with the landscape while recognizing that fires may need to be suppressed to protect life and property.

### **Reducing forest fuels**

Scientific evidence suggests that about 500,000 hectares of forest burned annually in British Columbia before widespread fire control, compared with the recent annual average of less than 50,000 hectares. These periodic fires burned the surface fuels that collect on the forest floor and reduced tree density, lowering both the risk of hot, uncontrollable wildfires and the forest's susceptibility to insect infestations and disease.

Decades of fire suppression have allowed forest fuels such as branches and dead trees to build up. This creates the potential for severe wildfires that burn hotter and can damage soils, leading to erosion and flooding. The risk is compounded by the warmer, drier temperatures associated with global warming and the increased number of trees killed by mountain pine beetles.

In July 2003, a provincial policy expanded opportunities for BC Parks to manage fuel buildup in parks and protected areas to protect visitor health and safety, reduce fuel accumulation, establish fuel breaks and remove dead trees.

In large wilderness parks, areas may be designated where wildfires can burn with little interference. In smaller parks near population centres, other techniques, such as thinning or pruning, may be used or may be combined with fire to reduce forest fuel buildup.

BC Parks continues to encourage research relating to fire management and its effect on vegetation diversity so it can be sure the most appropriate management strategies are available. Since burned areas are prime sites for alien plant invasions, BC Parks also monitors and controls invasive plants after a wildfire or prescribed fire in a protected area.

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**For more information refer to website: [www.bcparks.ca](http://www.bcparks.ca)**