



## Public Scoping for the NEPA Process in Support of Fire Management Plan Updates for 13 National Park Service Units

### Public Scoping for Environmental Assessment

December 4, 2015

The National Park Service (NPS) is starting the process to revise Fire Management Plans (FMP) for each of the Park Service Units within the Utah Parks Group and Southeast Utah Group (hereafter referred to as Utah Group Parks). The Park Units are listed below.

*Arches National Park, Bryce Canyon National Park, Capitol Reef National Park, Canyonlands National Park, Cedar Breaks National Monument, Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, Golden Spike National Historic Site, Hovenweep National Monument, Natural Bridges National Monument, Pipe Spring National Monument, Rainbow Bridge National Monument, Timpanogos Cave National Monument, and Zion National Park.*

The NPS anticipates completing a single Environmental Assessment (EA) in support of multiple FMPs. This EA is part of the process to update fire and fuels management strategies, manage vegetation, and update terminology within current federal wildland fire management policy. The NPS is seeking public suggestions and comments on the proposed project. This brochure initiates public scoping for the EA.

#### **Background**

The Utah Group Parks units are all located in Utah, except for Pipe Spring National Monument, which is located in northern Arizona, Hovenweep National Monument, which is located in both Utah and Colorado, and Glen Canyon National Recreation Area, which is located in both Utah and Arizona. Under NPS Policy (DO-18) “*Each park with vegetation capable of burning will prepare a Fire Management Plan to guide a fire management program that is responsive to the park’s natural and cultural resource objectives and to safety considerations for park visitors, employees, and developed facilities.*”

Of the 13 NPS parks covered under this EA, nine are supported by a 2003 Healthy Forest Initiative Categorical Exclusion (HFI CE) which will expire on September 30, 2016. These are:

- Arches National Park
- Canyonlands National Park
- Capitol Reef National Park
- Cedar Breaks National Monument
- Golden Spike National Historic Site

- Hovenweep National Monument
- Natural Bridges National Monument
- Pipe Spring National Monument
- Timpanogos Cave National Monument

The remaining four parks have existing EAs in support of FMPs. These are:

- Bryce Canyon National Park
- Glen Canyon National Recreation Area
- Rainbow Bridge National Monument (included in the GLCA EA)
- Zion National Park

The objective of this project is to prepare a programmatic EA in support of revised FMPs for all the Utah Group Parks. The FMPs will subsequently be completed after a decision document for the EA is signed, and will allow the Utah Group Parks to fulfill agency policies and requirements for strategic and terminology updates, and allow the NPS parks included in the Utah Group Parks to continue applicable fire management programs.

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Internal scoping by NPS specialists and staff occurred between February 3 and February 20, 2015 at four separate geographic locations in order to serve the 13 parks. The NPS is preparing this EA in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to provide the decision-making framework that: 1) explores management alternatives to meet each Park’s objectives; 2) evaluates potential impacts to Park resources and values; and 3) identifies mitigation measures to minimize the degree of these impacts. The EA will evaluate a “No Action Alternative” and at least one “Action Alternative”.

A “No Action Alternative” would continue the current management practices operating within the most recent Federal Wildland Fire and NPS policies. The nine parks with programs that are supported by the HFI CE would only be able to respond to wildfires with a suppression strategy, and would be unable to conduct any fuel reduction, defensible space, prescribed burning or targeted herbicide or biological control activities. The attendant negative effects would include continued accumulation of hazardous fuels and the associated risk to people, park infrastructure and natural and cultural resources. Suppression only strategies would also inhibit the natural

role of fire, and therefore beneficial effects of fire, in some of the park unit ecosystems. The four parks with existing EAs would continue with valid FMPs

An “Action Alternative” would describe revised FMPs in the Utah Group Parks. The revised FMPs would apply a flexible range of options and activities, and could be used to respond to changes in environmental conditions and the specific fire management operational program needs within each park. The NPS is considering a variety of components of an “Action Alternative”. As a result of internal scoping efforts, components being considered at this time include:

#### ***Possible Responses to Wildfire:***

- Suppress wildfire utilizing the full range of strategies and tactics allowed within park policies
- Manage unplanned ignitions to accomplish specific resource management goals
- Any combination of both of the above

#### ***Possible Planned Actions:***

The Action Alternative would allow each Park to establish or revise planned actions for fuel treatments. Potential projects specific to each park unit will be identified in the FMP. Following is a list of potential projects for fuel reduction, ecosystem restoration, and maintenance and control of non-native invasive species.

- Prescribed fire
- Manual and mechanical fuel reduction treatments.
- Herbicide application
- Use of biological agents (i.e. targeted grazing with domestic animals or species-specific defoliators)

Not all planned actions would be implemented in any or all of the parks. Additional objectives and mitigation tactics would be developed as part of this EA process to ensure public and fire fighter safety and minimize impacts to park resources and manmade improvements.

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There are two formal opportunities for the public to comment on this EA process: during this initial project scoping and again following release of the EA document. You are invited to participate in this process by voicing your ideas, suggestions, or concerns related to fire management activities at any of the Utah Group Parks. These comments will be considered during preparation of the EA and subsequent FMPs.

### **Overview of the Process**

The steps of the NEPA process for this project include:

- Public scoping period (December 4, 2015-January 8, 2016)\*
- Public scoping meetings, open house format, December 15, 2015, 5 to 7 pm, at the Cedar City Library and December 16, 2015, 6 to 8 pm, at the Salt Lake City Library. \*
- Preparation of the EA (public release expected Spring 2016)
- Public review of and comment on the EA\*
- Analysis of public comment on the EA
- Announcement of Decision
- Completion of Park-specific FMPs

*\*Indicates formal opportunities for public comment*

### **Resources and Concerns**

The EA will analyze potential impacts to a number of resources, which may include:

Soil, Water Resources (including floodplains and wetlands), Vegetation (including invasive exotic species), Wildlife, Species of Special Concern, Cultural and Historic Resources, Ethnographic Resources, Public Health and Safety, and Visitor Use and Experience.

### **Ideas to Consider**

Following are a few ideas to consider as you develop comments on this project:

- Are there any missing issues or concerns that should be addressed in the EA?
- Are there other options, alternatives, or information that you think should be considered?
- Do you have any other comments or suggestions, for us to consider regarding the fire management programs of the Utah Group Parks?

### **How do I comment on this project?**

Please submit your comments online at the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website:

<http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ZION>

Comments may also be sent via email to:

[Lisa\\_Hanson@nps.gov](mailto:Lisa_Hanson@nps.gov)

If you are unable to submit comments electronically, then you may submit written comments to:

Lisa Hanson  
NPS, Intermountain Regional Office  
P.O. Box 25287  
Denver CO 80225-0287

Please provide all initial comments by **January 8, 2016**.

*If you wish to be added to or removed from the Utah Group Parks mailing list for future correspondence, please so indicate in your response.*

