



## FINDING AID

# **YELLOWSTONE FIRE MANAGEMENT RECORDS 1918-Present**

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## ***HISTORY***

Fire management has concerned the administrators of Yellowstone National Park since its establishment in 1872. Fire management issues were initially tackled by the U. S. Army during its period of administration (1886-1918). With the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, the issue became a major focus of the NPS superintendents and staff.

1916 – The National Park Service is created. Congress provides them with minimal funding for the purpose of fighting fires. The majority of funding for federal fire response was controlled by the U.S. Forest Service until the 1960s. The National Park Service followed Forest Service policy, focusing on the suppression of all fires.

1921 – Yellowstone’s first fire lookout is built on Mount Washburn.

1916-1933 – Fire Protection was the dominant strategy, relying on the speed of fire recognition and quick response with a suppression strategy. This era is largely defined by a reactive rather than proactive approach.

1927 – The Forest Protection Board was created to coordinate fire management activities among federal agencies. The board required all national parks to have fire control plans that dictated reporting requirements, emphasized the need for cooperation with other agencies, and provided instructions for the maintenance of communication sets and other equipment.

1929 – The National Park Service’s first ever fire control plan is created at Glacier National Park. It outlined organizational structure, reporting requirements, and maintenance of equipment.

1933 – New Deal programs provided funding and resources that allowed the National Park Service to better implement their fire control plans. The focus remained on quick and total suppression.

1933-1942 – The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) assisted in fighting fires in Yellowstone. Their role included clearing brush, removing trees, and building fire lookouts as well as active suppression.

1935 – Wildlife scientists started to challenge the National Park Service’s policy of total fire suppression and removal of vegetation. They argued that these actions impeded wildlife patterns, altered the terrain, and generally disrupted natural cycles.

1935 – Responsibility for fighting building fires moved from the Maintenance division to the Ranger division in Yellowstone.

1950s – The National Park Service started to pull away from the Forest Service's model of fire study and fire suppression and started to focus on fire prevention and fire education.

1965 – As part of the Elk and Habitat Management Plan, Yellowstone started to experiment with controlled burning to restore historic elk ranges.

1968 – The National Park Service’s Green Book was published. It contained the administrative policies for natural areas within a park. It proposed that fires would be allowed to run their course when they remained within pre-established boundaries and contributed to land management objectives. The National Park Service changed its firefighting policy and adopted the view that fire can be beneficial for the ecosystem. The national parks became a testing ground for intentionally ignited fires and experiments in letting natural fires burn.

1969 – The Boise Interagency Fire Center (BIFC) was established, uniting the Bureau of Land Management with the Forest Service. In 1993, BIFC changed to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC).

1972 – Yellowstone implemented changes to its fire suppression strategy following the new guidance from the National Park Service in 1968. Lightning-ignited fires were not suppressed within the established areas of Mirror Plateau and Two Ocean Plateau.

1973 – The National Wildfire Coordinating Group was founded. Fire management was brought together under one standardized group that included multiagency fire planning and training.

1977 – The NPS’s Fire Policy Directive (NPS-18) came out and superseded all previous fire management policies. It stated that the National Park Service’s priorities were to protect lives, facilities, and cultural properties and to preserve natural resources and habitat. It provided clear guidelines for prescribed burning. It separated fires into two categories: management fires, which were allowed to burn, and wildfires, which were suppressed.

1988 – Lightning started 42 fires in and around the park along with 9 human-caused fires. In accordance with fire management policy, 18 lightning-caused fires in June and early July were evaluated and allowed to burn. Containment became unmanageable due to unexpected dry conditions. A total of approximately 800,000 acres (~36%) of the park burned.

1988 – National Park Service Director William Penn Mott declared a freeze to all prescribed burns in the national park system due to public outcry over fires in Yellowstone.

1989 – As a result of the 1988 Yellowstone Fires, a complete review of NPS-18 was ordered and all natural fires were suppressed until new fire management plans could be developed.

1995 – A revised fire policy was completed. It emphasized indirect attacks on fires and allowed for flexibility in types of responses. The National Park Service changed from looking at the origin of the fire to looking at its circumstances as the basis for decision making on how to deal with the fire. It led to greater coordination and cooperation among federal land management agencies.

2000s—Fire policies continue to be regularly reviewed and updated.

For further information about the history of fire management within the National Park Service see:

Rothman, H. (2005). *A Test of Adversity and Strength: Wildland Fire in the National Park System*. Washington, D.C: U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service.

## ***SCOPE AND CONTENT***

### FIRE MANAGEMENT RECORDS

1918-Present

*COLLECTION #* RG 03 Fire (YELL 199771)

*VOLUME* 54 LF

*DESCRIPTION* This record group contains materials related to fire management, policies, and the fires that occurred within Yellowstone National Park and the Greater Yellowstone Area from 1918 to the present, with the exception of records from the 1988 Fires. These records form a separate collection: 1988 Fire Records (RG03-1988).

Formats within this series include logbooks, correspondence, policies, reports, agreements, plans, statements of cost, situational analysis, photographs, VHS tapes, film reels, data, maps, infrared images, transparencies, slides, training manuals, handbooks, press releases, and news clippings.

Administrative records contain correspondence, policies, planning documents, agreements, and reports documenting the administrative aspects of planning for, preventing, and responding to fires. Although the bulk of the materials pertain to wildland fire, there is also a small amount of documentation for structural fire administration and response. Fire management has long been a branch of the Resource and Visitor Protection Division and its predecessors. Therefore, some administrative materials, particularly correspondence and reports, may also be found in the administrative records of the Protection and Safety record group (RG02).

Educational and outreach records include prevention campaign documents, fire fighter training materials, and public information materials such as visitor logbooks to Mount Washburn, press releases, and news clippings. Fire science records contain data on fuel moisture levels, weather reports, fire weather predictions and reports, and weather observations made out in the field. Records pertaining to individual fires include monthly and annual fire reports, lookout tower reports, initial fire reports, fire planning documents, final fire summary reports and reviews, incident narratives, fire maps, final statements of cost and building fire reports, and lookout tower logbooks.

While there is some information for fire management for the early years of NPS management of Yellowstone National Park, the bulk of the records date to after World War II. Although individual employees may be named in the records, particularly some of the logbooks, there is no comprehensive personnel information in this material. Many who served on fire crews, especially in the early years, worked as on-call or casual labor and do not appear to be reflected in the Park's personnel records. There is one list of fire crew employees for 1917 in the Fiscal, Personnel, and Supply Records (RG10-FPS).

These records are useful for those studying the progression of fire management policies and its effects over time. They provide insight into the role of science in determining policy. There is also documentation of the professionalization of fire science and fire management over the 20th century as well as within the National Park Service. Finally, this record group demonstrates the development of the concept of the ecosystem, specifically the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem, and the interagency cooperation necessary to manage issues that cross boundaries between public lands. Additional records regarding this interagency cooperation may be found in the Partnership Records (RG 07).

*ORGANIZATION*

Organized into four series: Series I: Fire Cache Administration; Series II: Wildland Fire Preparation and Prevention; Series III: Fire Response; Series IV: Weather Data

*PROVENANCE*

Transferred from the Yellowstone National Park Fire Cache as records become inactive.

*RESTRICTIONS*

Yes: Series 02, Wildland Fire Preparation & Prevention includes some archeological site information restricted by the 1979 Archeological Resources Protection Act. Consult the archivist for more information.

*ASSOCIATED  
MATERIALS*

1988 Fire Records (RG03-1988)  
Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives

Partnership Records (RG07)  
Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives

Maps and Drawings Collection, Series 06 (RGMAPS)  
Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives

Protection and Safety Records (RG02)  
Yellowstone National Park Combined Archives

## ***SERIES DESCRIPTIONS***

### *I. Fire Cache Administration, 1918-2007*

Formats within this series include correspondence, itineraries, policies, job descriptions, newspaper clippings, press releases, expense documents, situation report reviews, photos, cooperative agreements, logbooks and transparencies.

Correspondence records document administrative official's communication with internal employees, external state and federal agency officials, and, occasionally, the public. Subjects of the correspondence include the development of policies, arrangement of training conferences, description of employee positions, expenses, and reviews of situation reports. Within the correspondence are intermittent photos depicting personnel and equipment. Separately, press releases created by the park to provide updates on specific fires. News coverage of fires are incorporated in the form of newspaper clippings.

Additionally, the series includes interagency fire management policies, cooperative agreements between the National Park Service and other state and federal agencies, and materials about the Wildland Urban Interface Project. Fire Lookout logbooks have handwritten entries describing daily activities performed at the Mt. Washburn, Divide, Pelican Cone, Mt. Holmes, and Mt. Sheridan towers along with some documentation of visitation. The limited amount of helicopter and smokejumper logbooks detail the frequency and purpose of the use of each. Further, there are fire lookout maps that depict seen-area observations made from towers in 1946. Additional partnership and interagency memoranda of agreements may be found in Partnership Records (RG07); some reports and administrative materials may be found in the records of the division chief, which are part of the Protection and Safety Records (RG02).

Records are arranged first by format and then chronologically. Folders that span extended time periods are placed chronologically according to their start date.

### *II. Wildland Fire Preparation and Prevention, 1929-2007*

Formats within this series include public educational materials including order forms for merchandise and signage, management plan drafts, handbooks, training manuals, slides, and project files.

This series contains records documenting campaigns to inform the public about preventing wildfires from the World War II era, management plans and handbooks for fire suppression, training manuals created by NPS and fellow government agencies, hand-drawn slides depicting fire response dos and don'ts, helicopter safety, organizational structure, and project files on prescribed fires and burn plans to reduce fuel loads.

Within this series, fire presuppression and prevention refer to related but distinct activities. Fire presuppression is composed of "activities in advance of fire occurrence to ensure effective suppression action. Includes planning the organization, recruiting and training, procuring equipment and supplies, maintaining fire equipment and fire control improvements, and



negotiating cooperative and/or mutual aid agreements" (<https://www.nwcg.gov/>). Additional information about the negotiation of cooperative or mutual aid agreements may be found within Series I.

Broadly, fire prevention is "activities directed at reducing the incidence of fires, including public education, law enforcement, personal contact, and reduction of fuel hazards (fuels management)" (<https://www.nwcg.gov/>). Records related to prevention within this series primarily document public education through PSAs and Smokey Bear memorabilia along with the evaluation and reduction of fuel hazards.

Records are arranged first by subject and then chronologically.

### *III. Fire Response, 1919-2013*

Formats within this series include fire management reports, initial fire reports, fire lookout reports, situational analysis, implementation plans, delegation of authority, final fire reports, comprehensive fire reports, incident action plans, fire reviews, fire incident narratives, fire base camp logbooks, maps, fire atlases, final statements of cost, building fire reports, glass slides, slides, negatives, photographic prints, infrared images, VHS tapes, 8mm film reels, and 16mm film reels.

This series documents the existence, progression of and response to fires within Yellowstone. Within this series are monthly and annual fire management reports that summarize the fire events for that period, reports from fire lookout towers, and individual fire reports. The reports generally consist of forms summarizing key fire incident information such as the location of the fire, date it was reported, date it was declared out, and often small maps of the fire and a short narrative summary of the incident. Within the final fire reports boxes are occasional photos, infrared images, and videos documenting the action or aftermath of specific fires. Post-incident administrative reviews, often labeled "critiques", document the degree of success that was achieved in managing specific fires. Final incident narratives describe events in the course of managing a fire that needed more explanation than was stated in the standard fire incident forms. For certain individual fires, there are also base camp logbooks, supply orders, and daily check sheets. This series also contains records pertaining to building and structural fires, including annual reports, correspondence, trainings, procedures for managing building fires, and individual fire reports and incident reports.

The fire maps are final fire perimeter maps, final fire progression maps, or show final status of incidents. Some maps were made into bundles or an atlas format and would contain maps and charts, along with plans on how to deal with an incident or the fire's history. There are also final statements of cost that were incident specific comprehensive cost summaries. Fire maps that could not be linked to a specific document or folder, or that required special oversized housing, have been transferred to the Map and Drawings Collection, Series VI: Fire Management (RGMaps).

Early records are arranged first by format and then chronologically. More recent records, from the 2000s and later, are grouped chronologically by the name of the fire. Individual reports, notes, weather data, etc., are all kept together under the title of each fire.

IV. *Weather Data, 1935-2013*

This series contains handwritten data from direct weather observation by the park fire cache, 10-day weather records, fire weather records and observations, fire weather reports, and fuel moisture data. Additional weather data, not specific to fire management, can be found in the Environmental Science Records (RG01-ENVIRO).

Records are arranged first by format and then chronologically.

**CONTAINER LIST**

<b>Series Nbr</b>	<b>Series Title</b>
01	Fire Cache Administration
	<b>Box Nbr Title</b>
	01 Administrative Correspondence, 1918-1953
	02 Administrative Correspondence, 1940-1953
	03 Administrative Correspondence, 1940-1955
	04 Administrative Correspondence, 1954-1974
	05 Administrative Correspondence, 1972-1990
	06 Administrative Correspondence, 1990-1995
	07 Administrative Correspondence, 1995-2000
	08 Press Releases, 1976-2013
	09 News Coverage, 1924-2007. Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1939-1953
	10 Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1940-1981
	11 Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1974-1987
	12 Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1972-1995
	13 Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1982-1999
	14 Interagency Management Plans and Agreements, 1998-2007
	15 Wildland Urban Interface Project, 2001-2002
	16 Wildland Urban Interface Project, 2002-2003. Fire Cache Daily Logbooks, 1959-1968
	17 Fire Cache Daily Logbooks, 1968-1991
	18 Divide Lookout Tower Logbooks, 1958-1969, 1979-1991. Mt. Holmes Lookout Logbooks, 1958-1962
	19 Mt. Holmes Lookout Logbooks, 1965-1979
	20 Mt. Holmes Lookout Logbooks, 1980-1989. Mt. Sheridan Lookout Logbooks, 1938, 1958-1962
	21 Mt. Sheridan Lookout Logbooks, 1965-1983
	22 Mt. Sheridan Lookout Logbooks, 1984-1989. Mt Washburn Lookout Logbooks, 1942-1958
	23 Mt. Washburn Lookout Logbooks, 1958-1973
	24 Mt. Washburn Lookout Logbooks, 1974-1981
	25 Mt. Washburn Lookout Logbooks, 1982-1996
	26 Mt. Washburn Lookout Logbook, 2004-2005
	27 [left empty for future use]
	28 [left empty for future use]
	29 [left empty for future use]
	30 [left empty for future use]
	31 [left empty for future use]
	32 Mt. Washburn Visitors' Registers, 1967-1969, 1984-1985. Pelican Cone Lookout Logbook, 1958-1961

**Series 01 (cont.)**

<b>Box Nbr</b>	<b>Title</b>
33	Pelican Cone Lookout Logbooks, 1963-1975, 1992
34	Helicopter Logbook, 1971. Smokejumper's Logbooks, 1957-1964, 1966, 1968-1970
35	Fire Lookout Map "seen area" transparencies, 1946 [oversized]

<b>Series Nbr</b>	<b>Series Title</b>
02	Wildland Fire Preparation and Prevention

<b>Box Nbr</b>	<b>Title</b>
36	Fire Prevention and Fire Presuppression, 1931-1960
37	Fire Presuppression, 1958-1964
38	Fire Presuppression, 1965-1972
39	Fire Presuppression, 1973-1990
40	Fire Presuppression, 1987-1992
41	Fire Presuppression, 1992-1994
42	Fire Presuppression, 1991-2003
43	Fire Presuppression, 2003-2005. Fire Presuppression, Training Materials and Manuals, 1939-1953
44	Fire Presuppression, Training Materials and Manuals, 1954-1961
45	Fire Presuppression, Training Materials and Manuals, 1963-1965
46	Fire Presuppression, Viewgraph Training Slides, 1965?
47	Fire Presuppression, Viewgraph Training Slides, 1965?
48	Fire Presuppression, Training Materials and Manuals, 1969-1976
49	Fire Presuppression, Training Materials and Manuals, 1980-2000. Wildland Fire Fuels Management, 1929-1979
50	Wildland Fire Fuels Management, 1949-1993
51	Wildland Fire Fuels Management, 1993-1998
52	Wildland Fire Fuels Management, 1999-2006
53	Wildland Fire Fuels Management for Structural Protection, 1950-2007 <b>[Restricted]</b>
54	Wildland Fire Fuels Management, Project File – Norris Prescribed Fire, 2006-2007

<b>Series Nbr</b>	<b>Series Title</b>
03	Fire Response

<b>Box Nbr</b>	<b>Title</b>
55	Monthly, Annual and Multiple Season Fire Management Reports, 1928-1970
56	Monthly, Annual and Multiple Season Fire Management Reports, 1939-1960
57	Monthly, Annual and Multiple Season Fire Management Reports, 1960-1972
58	Monthly, Annual and Multiple Season Fire Management Reports, 1971-2002
59	Monthly, Annual and Multiple Season Fire Management Reports, 2003-2006. Initial Fire Reports, 1974-2002

**Series 03 (cont.)****Box Nbr Title**

- 60 Initial Fire Reports, 2003-2007. Fire Lookout Reports, 1942-1960
- 61 Fire Lookout Reports, 1961-1979
- 62 Fire Lookout Reports, 1981-1992. Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA), 1994-2000
- 63 Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA), 2001-2003
- 64 Wildland Fire Situation Analysis (WFSA), 2003-2007
- 65 Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP), 1976-2001
- 66 Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP), 2001-2002
- 67 Wildland Fire Implementation Plan (WFIP), 2004-2007
- 68 Delegation of Authority and Return of Delegation of Authority, Transfer of Command, 1974-2007.  
Final Fire Reports, 1931-1932
- 69 Final Fire Reports, 1926-1932
- 70 Final Fire Reports, 1933-1936
- 71 Final Fire Reports, 1937-1942
- 72 Final Fire Reports, 1940-1943
- 73 Final Fire Reports, 1942-1948
- 74 Final Fire Reports, 1949-1953
- 75 Final Fire Reports, 1954-1959
- 76 Final Fire Reports, 1960-1964
- 77 Final Fire Reports, 1965-1975
- 78 Final Fire Reports, 1975-1979
- 79 Final Fire Reports, 1980-1989
- 80 Final Fire Reports, 1990-1994
- 81 Final Fire Reports, 1995-2003
- 82 Final Fire Reports, 2004-2007. Incident Summaries 1966-2007
- 83 Comprehensive Fire Reports and Incident Action Plans, 1996-2007
- 84 Comprehensive Fire Reports and Incident Action Plans, 2007-2013
- 85 Incident Action Plans, 2013. Fire Reviews 1953-2000, 2013
- 86 Final Incident Narrative, 1926-1977
- 87 Final Incident Narrative, 1979-2007
- 88 Individual Fire Base Camp Logbooks, 1949-1960, 1979
- 89 Maps, 1931-1996
- 90 Maps, 1998-2003
- 91 Maps, 2004-2007
- 92 Fire Atlases, 1931-1959
- 93 Final Statement of Costs, 1929-2013
- 94 Building Fire Management, 1933-1981. Building Fires and Reports, 1949-1969
- 95 Building Fires and Reports, 1956-1969
- 96 Building Fires and Reports, 1970-1998

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<b>Series Nbr</b>	<b>Series Title</b>
04	Weather Data
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98	Field Weather Observations, 1966-2013
99	Daily Fire Weather Reports, 1971-1999
100	Fire Weather Log, 1935-1940
101	Fire Weather Observations, 1935-1962
102	Fire Weather Observations, 1963-1968
103	Fire Weather Observations, 1969-1975. AFFIRMS Data: Fire Weather Observations, 1977-1978
104	AFFIRMS Data: Fire Weather Observations, 1979-1983
105	AFFIRMS Data: Fire Weather Observations, 1984-1987
106	AFFIRMS Data: Fire Weather Observations, 1989-1997
107	AFFRIMS Data: Fire Weather Observations, 1997-2000. 10-day Weather Records, 1931-1962
108	10-day Weather Records, 1963-1976
109	Burn Index & Lightning Occurrence 1958-1968

### **Separated Materials**

<b>Box Nbr</b>	<b>Title</b>
110	Separated Media