



NEWS RELEASE

Sequoia National Forest and the Giant Sequoia National Monument

1839 S. Newcomb Street, Porterville, CA 93257

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From the Sequoia National Forest

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Wildfire Management in the Golden Trout Wilderness

The Golden Trout Wilderness (GTW) is located in a mountain landscape with endless sky and jagged peaks. Located in the Sierra Nevada just south of Mount Whitney (14,500 feet), miles of trails wander through majestic forests of pine and fir, giant sequoia groves, meandering green meadows along brooks and thundering rivers. This wilderness (475 square miles) is a paradise of pristine lakes and streams inhabited by several species of trout, including two subspecies of the rare and beautiful golden trout, California's state fish.

The Sierra Nevada is one of the most fire-prone and fire adapted ecosystems in the nation, where natural systems have evolved with fire. Each year lightning-caused wildland fires, a natural disturbance, help shape our forests. As the fires are discovered, public land managers evaluate each one to determine the best approach to managing the wildfire.

The Lion Fire: Nature strikes

On July 8, lightning struck in the Golden Trout Wilderness. Historically, fire would have occurred every 15-20 years in this forest type; however in this area there is no record of a large fire occurring within the last 90 years.

This year the high snowpack and cool temperatures of spring and early summer have provided a rare opportunity to re-introduce fire into this area of the wilderness. By taking advantage of managing this wildfire in a wet year, risks are reduced for future large, destructive, and smokier fires.

Fire strategies consider many factors: risks to public and firefighter safety; fuel conditions; weather; land management plan and Wilderness Act direction; smoke management; values to protect and available firefighting assets. Under the right conditions, land managers use fire to restore resilience to ecosystems, improve wildlife habitat, and prevent heavy accumulations of flammable fuels, while actively protecting lives, property, and resources.

One goal for the Lion Fire embraces the principles of ecological restoration. The long-term environmental benefits of the wildfire is restoration of approximately 22,000 acres of the wilderness ecosystem, where in the future, fire can play its natural role.

Managing Fire, Smoke and its Duration

We realize that our response to this fire has many impacts to mountain communities and our visitors. We understand this and appreciate your patience. By managing the Lion Fire and the associated smoke event this year under the cool, wet conditions, the outcome should result in minimized smoke impacts in the future.

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The Sierra Nevada was historically a hazy place in the summer months where fire and smoke played a natural role in the landscape. For the past 33 days, we have managed the fire utilizing high sierra rock barriers, previous burn areas of past wildfires, and other natural barriers such as rivers and creeks.

The Lion Fire incident management organization has been very mindful in their approach and has implemented both aerial and hand-firing operations to reduce fire intensity, to guide the fire, or defend the perimeter and values at risk (private land and cabins). This is an example of restoration using a natural change agent (lightning caused ignition) that has been a significant challenge on multiple fronts.

We are sharing this fire with Sequoia-Kings National Parks. For land management agencies, managing wildfires is some of the most challenging work we undertake. On a daily basis fire officials, and the California Air Quality Control Districts (CAQCD), together use their expertise and advice on how to mitigate the visibility and public health impacts of the smoke.

One of the most important strategies for fire agencies is to light *backing fires* to prevent intensely destructive wildfire from burning uphill. Timing is everything when a narrow window is open. Fire officials consider CAQCD's expertise and advice to support selected days for increased burning when smoke dispersal is optimum, versus days with projected poor air quality.

The Lion Fire has been a challenging process that is drawing closer to perimeter lines. With ecological restoration as a driving force, managing nature's processes in the Sierra Nevada requires numerous decision points. Our daily consultations with a network of dedicated land management professionals allows a seamless process to restore one of California's landscapes. Jointly we are protecting critical watersheds and threatened and endangered species, while restoring the places people love and value.

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Editor's note: For the Lion Fire photographs and maps visit: <http://inciweb.org>. Lower resolution MODIS imagery is available twice per day from the Remote Sensing Applications Center. Click on the fire area you want to view at: <http://activefiremaps.fs.fed.us/imagery.php>.

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