

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH STUDY YOSE-00406
(PERMIT # YOSE-2010-SCI-0026)**

**Understanding Stakeholder Perceptions of Fire and
Smoke Management in Yosemite National Park**

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Final Report

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I. Executive Summary

The information contained within this report was obtained during the summer of 2010 via face-to-face interviews with thirty-eight (38) participants throughout the Yosemite region. Since these individuals do not necessarily represent the general population due to the fact that they were not selected at random from that population, their responses should not be extrapolated – and the opinions expressed should only be attributed to themselves. One should use caution in assuming that the opinions stated within this report represent more broadly held views.

The potential respondent “*pool*” developed by Yosemite National Park (YNP) personnel contained the names and contact information for forty-seven individuals – some of whom could not be reached and others who were unavailable. Three individuals declined to participate – resulting in an overall response rate of 93%. Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed and returned by the Principal Investigator (PI) to the participant for review, revision and ultimate written approval allowing its use within the compilation attached to this document. Respondent-based information was then coded by stakeholder affiliation as well as geographic location. Those breakdowns follow (with number of individuals interviewed within brackets):

- Affiliations: county government (6); town planning advisory councils and local residents (5); state and federal agencies (8); environmental non-governmental organizations (6); the media (5); business, tourism and chambers of commerce (6); and tribes (2).
- Locations: Madera County (5); Mariposa County (10); Tuolumne County (7); Eastern Sierra – primarily Mono and Inyo Counties (9); and Central Valley to Bay Area (7).

The PI has based data analysis upon respondent affiliations due to the fact that Fire Management Program (FMP) personnel wished to gain a better “*understanding of stakeholder perceptions of fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park.*” Such analysis generated various findings (*F*) – some of which are listed on the next page:

- F-1 *Fire management decisions are perceived as being made by dedicated, well-trained, competent and experienced professionals deserving of the public's trust;*
- F-2 *FMP personnel are perceived as doing a reasonable job in striking a proper balance between improving forest health and public safety (primarily through prescribed burns) while not adversely affecting public health (through smoke generated during prescribed burns);*
- F-3 *However, FMP personnel are also perceived as not fully fathoming the range of economic consequences plaguing gateway communities and counties whenever prescribed burns get out of control; as not paying sufficient attention to public health impacts caused by smoke from fires generated within YNP; as not providing sufficient advanced notification regarding prescribed burns to people with health issues; and as being somewhat insensitive to smoke impacts extending beyond the crest of the Sierra Nevada into Mono Basin and beyond;*
- F-4 *Study participants appeared quite knowledgeable about the positive role played by fire in improving forest health; that fire is a natural part of the ecosystem; and that its careful use can be a very valuable tool in fuels reduction lessening worse fire events in the future. Study participants from the mountain counties appear more forgiving of smoke impacts as long as the event is of relatively short (less than two weeks) duration;*
- F-5 *Study participants would like to see FMP personnel utilize a variety of approaches (such as interagency collaboration and cooperation, partnerships, dialogues, etc.) for more actively engaging the public in fire and smoke management issue in the futures.*

These and other findings influenced formulation of the following recommendations (R) for consideration by FMP personnel and YNP administration:

- R-1. *Develop effective interaction and engagement between YNP administration and FMP personnel with study participants as soon as possible;*
- R-2. *Utilize a range of electronic technology approaches in communicating FMP information to the public;*
- R-3. *FMP initiation of regularly scheduled dialogues with counterparts in other agencies (including county governments and regional air pollution control districts);*
- R-4. *Expand FMP's options for fuels reduction;*
- R-5. *FMP initiation of a "no prescribed burning policy" during the week immediately preceding and including each summer holiday weekend;*
- R-6. *Provide regular opportunities for stakeholder involvement in FMP activities;*
- R-7. *FMP collaborating with other stakeholders to obtain additional funding for new and/or expanded activities.*

The following report provides an overview and context for this study, as well as presenting detailed findings and elaboration of each recommendation. Actual statements (quotes) from respondents incorporated throughout the report serve to illuminate perceptions held about the Fire Management Program and its desired future. The attached transcripts provide greater detail for those wishing to delve deeper into the extensive data sets.

II. Overview of the Project

This scientific research study builds upon the Principal Investigator's (PI's) draft proposal submitted to Fire Management Program (FMP) personnel at Yosemite National Park (YNP) during a 2005 sabbatical with the University of California, Merced.¹ Historically (prior to implementation of the fire suppression policy at the beginning of the 20th century), approximately 16,000 acres of timber land within the Park burned each year due to natural circumstances. During the 1970s, federal policy changed to allow fires to burn “*naturally*.” Even with this policy change, however, not as much acreage as desired was burned (either naturally, or via prescribed burning) due to factors such as weather conditions as well as public complaints. During the summer of 2004, for example, complaints to the Park Superintendent resulted in NPS personnel having to spend \$1.2 million on construction of a line around a fire that ended up engulfing 5,000 acres.

In 2005, YNP did not appear to have an “*anticipatory*” process in place to spell out what would be done with public complaints regarding fire and smoke. Rather, actions appeared to be taken on an ad hoc basis. Then-FMO Nichols viewed the PI's proposal as an opportunity for developing a process through which various stakeholder groups could initially (and systematically) voice their opinions, and later engage in constructive and productive dialogue with FMP personnel on issues of expressed concern.

The PI's 2005 proposal outlined a multi-phased process through which a pilot public policy education project focused on fire ecology and smoke management might be designed and pre-tested; implemented with a diverse set of stakeholders in the Yosemite region in order to obtain their individual perspectives; and ultimately incorporate their concerns via ongoing facilitated dialogues directly involving FMP personnel and stakeholder representatives in collaboratively shaping and supporting the FMP's future direction.

The proposal was strongly supported by Nichols, who provided funding for the initial phase implemented over the summers of 2005 and 2006.² During that time, the PI in concert with FMP personnel developed and pre-tested an interview instrument with twenty-one YNP employees (including FMP staff, YNP administration, and other individuals very knowledgeable about the fire management program) whose names were contained on a list approved by YNP administration. As a result of those individual interviews, FMP professionals gained a first-hand impression of the researcher's approach while also being able to assess (via subsequent debriefing sessions covering both process and substance) the extent to which proposed questions elicited the range and depth of response sought on issues of primary concern. Pre-test concerns were then incorporated in a revised survey instrument for future implementation with a

¹ The proposal was submitted to then Fire Management Officer Tom Nichols and Fire Education Specialist Deb Schweizer. Chief Ranger Steve Shackelton (who at that time was on temporary assignment at UC Merced collaborating in the design and development of the Sierra Nevada Research Institute to be located within Yosemite National Park) facilitated my initial contact with them and later provided administrative support during the project's initial phase.

² PNW Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Project H8W07060001: “*Pilot Public Policy Education Demonstration Project to Refine and Improve Smoke Management Planning for Yosemite National Park and Gateway Communities.*”

continuum of interests³ having a direct stake in fire and smoke management planning for Yosemite National Park and surrounding area.⁴

In early 2007, Nichols requested the PI submit a new proposal addressing survey implementation with a diverse set of stakeholders. That proposal was subsequently funded, although activity was delayed due to several events beyond the control of the PI and YNP colleagues.⁵ Survey implementation finally occurred during the summer of 2010.⁶ This report is based upon the responses from the thirty-eight individuals who consented to be interviewed.⁷ The reader will be reminded repeatedly that those individuals do not necessarily represent the general population due to the fact that they were not selected at random from that population, and therefore their responses should not be extrapolated; the opinions expressed should only be attributed to themselves. One should use caution in assuming that the opinions stated within this report represent more broadly held views.

III. Methodology

A. Generation of Potential Participants

Based upon pre-tests, the PI compiled a preliminary list of potential stakeholder groups to be contacted for inclusion in this study, and committed to interviewing at least thirty representatives on that list. The initial list (prepared in 2007) identified the following interests: county and regional air quality regulators; county governments and agencies; chambers of commerce; tribal

³ including representatives from gateway communities, local governments, air pollution control districts, chambers of commerce, the media and others.

⁴ By late 2006, FMO Nichols had been promoted and relocated to the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho while Fire Education Specialist Schweizer had transferred to Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park to assume expanded duties there. Kelly Martin (former FMO with the U.S. Forest Service) arrived as Yosemite's new FMO – recently retitled Chief of Fire & Aviation Management – with Bret Meldrum (Branch Chief for Visitor Use & Social Sciences Resource Management) replacing Schweizer as the Park's technical representative on this Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Project.

⁵ the first of which was the PI's appointment as Interim Director of his university's newly-created Center for Environmental Research, Education and Outreach (CEREO); the second being the Federal Government's requirement that agency-sponsored public surveys be approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Although "*expedited review and approval*" was requested during 2007 and 2008, approval was not obtained until August 6, 2009 – too late that summer for meaningful attention by the Principal Investigator.

The proposal as originally envisioned included stakeholder assessment involving both Yosemite as well as Sequoia - Kings Canyon [SEKI] National Parks, with the PI responsible for data gathering from Yosemite, and his Research Assistant (RA) responsible for SEKI. Unfortunately, the RA was only able to make preliminary contact (during October, 2007) with SEKI personnel before withdrawing from WSU and accompanying her spouse to Seattle, WA following his graduation from WSU's Vet School and subsequent acceptance of a job offer in the Puget Sound area. As a result, the study was reduced to just Yosemite – but also expanded to include a greater number (and broader range) of participants.

⁶ While awaiting OMB approval, the PI was allowed to field test the interview instrument with nine stakeholder representatives. Those interviews were conducted during the summer of 2008 and involved two county Supervisors (Mariposa and Tuolumne), two county air pollution control officers (Mariposa and Tuolumne), two gateway community representatives (Groveland and Mariposa), representatives from two environmental NGO's (Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center and The Sierra Club) and a representative from the media (Fresno Bee). A summary of findings from those preliminary interviews was later shared with Meldrum, Martin, Nichols and Dr. Gus Smith (Yosemite's Fire Ecologist).

⁷ The interview instrument (list of questions) is included as Appendix 11.

governments and councils; gateway communities and organizations; interest and user groups (primarily environmental non-profit organizations); and the media. As a result of further discussions with Bret Meldrum, the Park's technical representative, that initial list was fine-tuned during 2010 to include county and tribal representation from both sides of the Sierra Nevada as well as expanded to include representation from other agencies responsible for fire prevention / suppression in the Yosemite region (e.g., the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and Cal Fire). Meldrum and colleagues then generated a list of forty-seven potential individuals⁸, which was followed by Chief of Fire & Aviation Management Martin's letter⁹ to each person with information about the study and her request for their participation.

B. Response Rate

The PI then communicated via email request¹⁰ with each person on the master list prior to telephone contact in order to establish a date, time and location for the interview. Although almost everyone (e.g., forty-five of the forty-seven individuals on the list) responded to the PI's solicitation, four individuals could not be scheduled¹¹ during the summer of 2010. Based upon this development, the effective "*survey participant pool*" was reduced to forty-one individuals. Of that number, three individuals declined to participate.¹² The PI was subsequently successful in interviewing the remaining thirty-eight individuals on the list (for a response rate of 93%).

C. Interview Process

One of the conditions set by NPS representatives was that interviews be tape recorded barring participant objection. The stated rationale for this request was so that any expressed "*nuances*" could be captured and made part of the record. All participants agreed to taped interviews.

All participants were also interviewed face-to-face at their designated locations. Interviews ranged from 20 minutes to slightly over one hour in length. The average interview took approximately 40 minutes to complete. Given the far-flung locations where participants were located¹³, the PI attempted to schedule multiple interviews whenever an interview required a round-trip of two hours or more from his work site¹⁴ at Fish Camp, California. While the majority of interviews were conducted in this manner, the PI still ended up traveling over 3,500 miles during the summer of 2010 completing this project task.

Each taped interview was then transcribed by the PI and returned to the interviewee for review and revision. (*The PI's rule of thumb was that for every hour of taped interview, three hours would be required for transcription*). If any changes were made by the interviewee to the initial

⁸ including representation and contact information (phone number, email address).

⁹ included as Appendix 1.

¹⁰ A copy of which is included as Appendix 2.

¹¹ due to such factors as death in the family, travel and/or work schedule, or resignation (with the position currently unfilled).

¹² Those individuals represented non-federal agencies (2) and an environmental NGO (1). Both non-federal representatives indicated they did not feel the study was pertinent to their responsibilities, and they would have nothing to contribute. The environmental NGO representative responded that while she individually wished to participate, she could not speak for her organization.

¹³ delineated by San Francisco to Sparks, Nevada along the northern perimeter, and Fresno to Bishop along the southern perimeter. Appendix 3 contains a map of the area pin-pointing where each interview occurred.

¹⁴ and family cabin.

transcript, the PI would then incorporate those changes in a revised transcript and return it to the interviewee for final review. Once the transcript had been approved by the interviewee, the PI would then seek the interviewee's written consent to have all responses treated anonymously and randomly entered in a compilation to be attached to the final report.¹⁵

As previously noted: sentiments expressed by the thirty-eight individuals participating in this study do not necessarily represent the general population due to the fact that they were not selected at random from that population; therefore, their responses should not be extrapolated. One should use caution in assuming that the opinions stated within this report represent more broadly held views.

D. Respondent Coding

Each respondent was then coded by stakeholder affiliation as well as geographic location, with their respective responses entered under each category. Category breakdowns follow:

By Stakeholder Affiliation

County Government (6)
Town Planning Adv. Council / Local Resident (5)
State and Federal Agencies (8)
Environmental NGOs (6)
Media (5)
Business & Tourism / Chambers of Commerce (6)
Tribal Government (2)

By Geographic Location

Madera County (5)
Mariposa County (10)
Eastern Sierra¹⁶ (9)
Tuolumne County (7)
Central Valley / S.F. (7)

IV. Data Analysis

Preliminary review of responses quickly confirmed that considerably more insight could be gained by focusing on stakeholder affiliation rather than geographic location, since the former tended to be fairly well distributed throughout the latter.¹⁷ Such an approach also made it much easier to identify common themes as well as general perceptions held.

Stakeholder affiliation data was then copied onto new electronic files¹⁸ with the coding attached, so the PI could be assured that respondent information would indeed be randomly entered. Once randomization had occurred, individual codes were deleted and responses were further checked for typographical errors (generated by the PI during the transcription process and/or missed by the respondent in its review). This approach yielded over two hundred pages of interview transcripts.¹⁹

¹⁵ The compilation (by stakeholder affiliation) is included as Attachments 4-10.

¹⁶ primarily Mono and Inyo counties.

¹⁷ although respondents from Town Planning Councils / Local Residents were confined to Mariposa and Tuolumne counties, and the two Tribal Government respondents were not limited by counties in their regional representation of both sides of the Sierra Nevada.

¹⁸ One file per stakeholder affiliation, thus generating the seven files included as Attachments 4-10.

¹⁹ Two hundred and five (205) pages to be exact from the following stakeholder affiliations (total pages in parentheses): agencies (41); business / chambers of commerce / tourism (31); county government (32); environmental NGO's (33); media (20); town planning advisory councils / local residents (34); and tribal government (14).

The PI then read through each stakeholder affiliation file, question by question, to identify major themes, capture highlights, and note specific responses (e.g., “*illustrative quotes*”) for later incorporation. This synthesis of stakeholder affiliation data was then transferred to a new file in which the survey instrument²⁰ served as data organizer; that is, the PI’s question by question synthesis from each of the seven stakeholder affiliations was entered under the appropriate interview question for further analysis.

That analysis generated the findings listed below. Section I (**Executive Summary**) highlights the major findings and recommendations. The following sections include selected verbatim responses (e.g. “*quotes*”) in order that stakeholder perceptions are presented as vividly as possible.

V. Findings

The survey instrument contained a series of eighteen (18) questions designed to elicit respondent: understanding of, and involvement with, Yosemite National Park and its Fire Management Program (FMP); assessment of that program – particularly with respect to smoke-generated health impacts; recommendations (if any) on how the FMP could be improved in the future; and personal commitment in helping the FMP move forward with proposed recommendations. A question-by-question summary of findings follows:

While almost every respondent expressed a very positive and long-term personal relationship with the Park (**Q-1**), fewer professed to understand how its FMP operated. At one end of the “*understanding*” continuum were Agency respondents who noted various cooperative interagency agreements and regular interactions with FMP personnel that kept them very well informed while providing numerous opportunities for further engagement; at the other were Environmental NGO respondents who tended to associate the FMP more with smoke generation and air pollution (health impacts) than with prevention of future conflagrations. To cite one respondent:

“I know from my work in air quality that obviously, wildfires can be a big concern. Because in the summer, we have an ozone problem. And so if you have large forest fires, you’re adding particulate matter on top of that – so it really becomes a multi-layered issue. So I know that the air district tries to work with the people who do the fire management, and find days that they do the burns that they have control over – on days when the air isn’t so bad...So it seems from an air pollution perspective, that maybe that’s kind of a nice middle ground – that we know the burning has to happen at some point, but maybe if we can do it on days that are cleaner or where there’s a breeze that’s going to blow it out, it will be better for the air basin so to speak.”
(Environmental NGO respondent)

Respondents from County Government and Business²¹ (and to a lesser extent, the Media) noted that the quarterly meetings of the *Gateway Partners* held in Yosemite Valley provide an excellent venue for learning about current and proposed activities throughout the Park. Tribal respondents, however, commented on the lack of current “*connection*” with YNP administration

²⁰ e.g., the list of questions asked during interviews.

²¹ which includes tourism and chambers of commerce.

– and the need to develop some sort of formal relationship involving tribal governments and YNP:

“...I would like to know more about Yosemite National Park, and working with the Tribal Relations person, or their heritage resource program folks. I don’t know enough of their people; I’ve never met anybody there. But I look forward to making those connections...” (Tribal Government respondent)

The second question (Q-2) asked respondents to specify their preferred information sources for learning about FMP activities and events. Not surprisingly, electronic communication was listed by respondents as their preferred source. Several noted the ease in which electronic messages received through email could be forwarded to constituents – thus expanding and improving communication between YNP colleagues and their counterparts beyond Park borders.

Respondents tended to divide electronic communication into two forms: information sent directly to the recipient (i.e., emails and attachments; media releases); or available only through web site retrieval by the recipient. Several current problems were identified regarding information gained directly via email news releases from YNP staff: (1) one first needed to be on the Park’s mailing list in order to gain such information; (2) information coming out of the Park (except for that generated by Gary Wuchner, the Fire Information Officer) tended to be primarily “*public relations*” oriented; and (3) the fire-related information tended at times to be less timely and more technical (and less contextual / educational) in conveying information to the public.

Several respondents from the Eastern Sierra suggested Yosemite’s FMP should incorporate into its messaging the kind of information provided by Deb Schweizer, the Fire Education Officer at Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park: technical and easily understood information readily incorporated by the media to reach the broader public.

Yosemite’s web site as currently configured is not where most respondents go for up-to-date information on FMP activities and events. To cite one respondent:

“The Park’s website is not the first place I check. It would be nice if there was a central point on line – their website for other things (like scientific studies) is great. I’m not sure if it’s the easiest to find, but it’s not difficult either. But in terms of something happening like a fire, it would be nice to have a central point on line where maybe every press release is collected and stored, so we have access to ‘this is what’s happening. Now here’s the latest update...’ The agency that has a great web site for this – and I think some of the Yosemite stuff does get on there – is Cal Fire... There’s kind of a problem in the past where Cal Fire will do that for Yosemite fire. They’ll have an incident report. But when we try to call about it, they’ll say ‘oh you need to call the National Park Service or whoever’s in charge,’ so there’s kind of an issue of who is actually in charge when these things happen.” (Media respondent)

Respondents generally noted that information provided by Yosemite FMP personnel within or just beyond Park boundaries (such as information boards; people posted near fire events to provide updates on current and anticipated conditions) is very informative, timely, and professionally delivered:

“When there are significant burns that are happening – and they’ve done this, either last year, or the year before – we actually had a communication guy who was making stops, and coming in and giving us flyers or even putting up an information board. When we start getting smoke in this area, it is very helpful to have that information board up. Again, one from the Park Service that says ‘this is what we’re doing, these are the impacts, this is what is normal, and this is what you should expect to see or hear or smell in the area.’ In the last couple of years, the Park Service has been really good about that. What that does for us, is when somebody drives up and they smell the smoke, their first thought is ‘forest fire!’ Second thought is ‘how close is it?’ ‘Is it in control or out of control?’ And, ‘am I safe here?’ And being able to have that information board that says, basically ‘here you are, here’s the control burn, we’ve got crews on it, and we anticipate it’s going to burn for five days, ten days, fifteen days or whatever, and these are going to be the impacts: you’re going to smell smoke, see smoke in the evenings and the mornings...’ (Business & Tourism respondent).

Such a positive assessment does not necessarily translate beyond Park boundaries – particularly to gateway communities:

“Currently private property owners and other residents in gateway communities fail to understand fire management concepts and fail to take any ownership (buy-in) in the fire management problem and solutions. Subsequently, there is an expectation that the Park Service or some other state or federal agency has the sole responsibility for gathering and sharing information. The mission of the Park has to reach out to the public, outside of the Park boundary, externalizing that effort. Information about the Program has primarily been done within the Park, expecting the public to read brochures or hear about it at a Ranger campfire program, or at an interpretive walk, when the Park needs to do a lot more taking that message out to the public.” (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

Another important source of information comes through one-on-one communication (either personally or via telephone) with FMP personnel. This source is regularly utilized by respondents from Agencies, Business & Tourism, County Governments, the Media and Town Planning Advisory Councils. Respondents’ previously-developed relationships with YNP personnel make this option most important whenever the need exists to quickly learn about a developing event within Park boundaries that may impact their constituents.

The quarterly Gateway Partners meetings were also noted as an important informational source regarding the many activities and events occurring within YNP. Information relating to the FMP, however, tends to gain agenda attention only after some fire event (such as the Telegraph Fire in 2008, or the Big Meadows Fire in 2009) has occurred – with negative economic impacts on various participating partners having already been experienced.

The third question (**Q-3**) asked respondents to briefly describe their understanding of how fire management decisions were arrived at within YNP. Agency and Tribal Government respondents professed a fairly good idea of the Park’s decision making process, given the fact that federal agencies (such as the USDA Forest Service, USDOJ Park Service, and USDOJ Bureau of Land Management) are required to follow federal guidelines regarding interagency burn plans and land management plans. Several agency respondents expressed the view that having seen YNP’s decision-making process in action during the Big Meadows Fire, it appeared to be more cumbersome and slow than how their own agencies made decisions. One respondent suggested

the need for an “*Organization 101*” training session for all agencies involved in fire management responsibilities to better gauge the similarities and differences underlying agency response to fire events. Such understanding is absolutely vital to possess when dealing with fire personnel from other agencies during emergency fire situations.

Most respondents from Business & Tourism, County Government, Environmental NGOs, and the Media indicated general knowledge of how YNP went about making decisions regarding fire management. While some expressed more detailed knowledge than others, the general consensus was that such decisions were being made by dedicated, well-trained, competent and experienced professionals deserving of the public’s trust.

Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondents, on the other hand, professed little understanding of, nor much positive impression from, how FMP decisions were made within YNP. Several respondents provided vivid (and somewhat pointed) stories relating to a lack of consideration given by YNP administration to local conditions and sentiment in determining where and when fire activities would occur. The first quote below highlights the lack of timely information being provided by FMP personnel and others:

“During the 2009 Foresta Fire, we in Midpines experienced a lot of smoke, and subsequently anxiety from the lack of information on details of that fire which was ‘on the heels’ of the catastrophic 2008 Telegraph Fire. I and dozens of families were evacuated from our homes for nearly two weeks and experienced major anxiety not knowing if our property and residences would be destroyed by fire. Worst, was not knowing where to go or whom to talk to about the details of the fire. I felt the same emotions and concerns with the 2009 Foresta Fire... This suggests to me that there is a need to significantly improve the way park visitors, park residents, and residents of nearby communities learn about prescribed fires and their proposed management strategies...” (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

The second quote emphasizes the need for FMP personnel learning from experience, and shifting some of their reliance placed on scientific studies towards “*plain old common sense*”:

“Unfortunately, the recent fire in the area of Foresta – which was out of control to begin with – and that was unfortunate. All the earmarks, the humidity factor, the moisture factor, the winds and all that – and still it went haywire. So – I don’t know. Well, except I’ll say this: I would NEVER start a fire in the heat of the fire season before winter. You’re asking for a lot of trouble. So I think...I’m sure there was something learned; however, that’s one of the most devastating fires since 1991 (the Complex Fire). What that didn’t burn, this one did. And the devastation is unbelievable. We need not to have repeated again. Somehow, we have to control that kind of devastation...” (A different Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

The fourth question (**Q-4**) addressed the extent to which media releases regarding smoke events would influence the respondent’s decision to visit YNP or stay away. What emerges from analysis of the data is an overall sentiment suggesting that one’s response to this question depended upon the timeliness and content of media releases provided by YNP personnel. All too often, YNP media releases were regarded by respondents as terse and technical; the releases were criticized for not including sufficient “*contextual*” information needed by readers to

determine whether or not to visit the Park. Several respondents also added that YNP media releases sent to local media²² outlets did not provide much advance notice of the event.

Respondents offered various suggestions regarding potential improvement in YNP media releases addressing fire and smoke events. Many of them framed media releases as opportunities to educate the public. Several respondents located on the eastern side of the Sierra Nevada suggested that YNP personnel consider modeling future media releases along the lines of what their colleague Deb Schweizer has been doing through her fire updates emanating from Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park:

“...She’ll say ‘we’re going to be burning in two areas; one is 34 acres and one is 15 acres. We expect them to burn for a week. And we anticipate that in the afternoons the smoke will be heading towards populated areas...’ And the media will pick that up and puts in a little blurb, and everybody knows about it. So, having those press releases ahead of time – people will know. They’ll read it, and then a day or so later they’ll see it, and then they’ll say ‘oh yeah, that’s the fire that was in the update.’...I would think the press release – if it’s a prescribed fire, or one that they’re using for management benefit – that it would talk about where the fire is, if there are places where you can see the fire from, to see the smoke from – but plus really stress the benefits of why they’re doing the burning, and maybe in the future the public’s likely to see the benefits of that fire. But then also, maybe just at the bottom provide a paragraph about where you could go if smoke bothers you or if you don’t want to be around the fire. It’s such a big area that you can surely find a place to go that meets your needs while you’re in there. And maybe that’s an opportunity to disperse people to some of the lesser visited parts of the Park, as well...” (Agency respondent)

Although the question referred specifically to “*media releases*,” several respondents expanded their answers to include other YNP informational sources such as its web site and call center. Neither generated respondent raves; both sources were viewed as difficult to access and navigate as well as not possessing current fire information.

The fifth question (**Q-5**) asked respondents to provide their overall assessment of fire and smoke management as currently practiced within YNP. The question was specifically worded “*when you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?*” For most respondents, what came to mind was the 2009 prescribed burn in the Foresta area of Yosemite National Park that turned into a major fire and smoke event (e.g., *the Big Meadows Fire*) impacting business and tourism on both sides of the Sierra Nevada. That very recent event in respondents’ memories resulted in the closure of Highway 120, large scale cancellation of lodging reservations, economic disruption throughout tourist-dependent gateway counties and communities bordering YNP, and resultant political fallout leading to the subsequent departure of Yosemite’s Acting Park Superintendent.

Many respondents (particularly those from Agencies, Environmental NGOs, and the Media) tempered their critiques of that incident by noting that **overall**, they hold FMP personnel in high regard: they are well organized and competent, know what they are doing, and deserving of the public’s trust:

²² It became quite apparent during the interview process that not all media outlets – particularly those on the eastside of the Sierras – were receiving YNP media releases and/or fire updates.

“I’ve always been impressed with Yosemite’s program. I guess it’s the jewel of the Park Service (to some people, anyway), and the amount of tourists they have and people they have in there – I’ve gone through there when they’ve been managing fires, and they do a great job of information and education. There’s billboards in turn-outs; there’s interpreters at turn-outs when there’s pretty good smoke that can be viewed from an area. And I think it’s great!”
(Agency respondent)

Various respondents added that they feel the lessons learned from the *Big Meadows Fire* will make that program even more effective through greater sensitivity shown towards local conditions and sentiments in the future. One reporter who covered the fire event and subsequent community meetings was particularly impressed over the way in which the Acting Park Superintendent shouldered direct responsibility for this prescribed fire that got away:

“And I’ll tell you probably the most positive thing I saw was the acting Superintendent’s response. He made no excuses. He accepted responsibility...– in all the years I’ve been doing this job – he probably was the most honest and forthcoming public official I’ve ever dealt with throughout that whole process. He was really, really good, and in a really bad position. The other thing: he showed up. He didn’t just talk. When it was happening, he was there. And when there were meetings, he was there. He didn’t send his PR people. And I thought that was probably one of the most positive responses to any controversy that I’ve ever seen in the Park. He did a really, really good job...” *(Media respondent)*

Nonetheless, the *Big Meadows Fire* event left an indelibly negative mark on many respondents’ memories. The following quotes illuminate the breadth and depth of respondents’ exasperation due to their perception that FMP personnel do not fully fathom the dire economic consequences plaguing gateway communities and counties whenever prescribed burns get out of control:

“You know, I think it’s a waste of money to keep surveying and surveying it when you know in August you shouldn’t be burning. August is the deepest, darkest, hottest month that you shouldn’t be doing things – and maybe into the beginning to middle of September – because we don’t get rain here for months and months at a time...It’s our hottest season. It’s a no brainer. We know that’s the hottest season. Again, I understand they have certain times they can do things; but that’s a huge tourism time. And these gateways and Yosemite...It’s a BIG season, and when people see smoke, they think fire, and of the past, and they don’t want to go there.”
(Business & Tourism respondent)

“So I think that’s what we really want to emphasize here at the county, is the fact that we are a tourist-based economy. That is the biggest sector of our economy. We have from Memorial Day until Labor Day as a peak period, though we have year-round tourists. The peak period is Memorial Day through Labor Day. And to have prescribed burns – if they’re going to happen during the summer time, it would be nice if we were contacted at the local level (with several weeks’ notice, at least). Not necessarily that we have to have an opportunity to comment, but so that we have some advance notice. The one that happened was over the holiday weekend that affects tourism. If they could do them before Memorial Day, or after Labor Day, that’s a very dry season so that’s always not wise either. That is our concern: the impact on tourism.”
(County Government respondent)

“I believe the Park needs to experiment with prescriptions involving smaller fires where ‘fire lines’ include mechanically removing vegetation to reduce risk and increase the management of fuels and smoke...” (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

“I couldn’t understand why is it that the Park Service would light that prescribed fire off at the wrong time of the year. As a former Hot Shot crew member, it was like ‘isn’t that a little risky in July or August?’ I remember it happened in the middle of fire season. And like ‘WHAT are they doing?’ It’s way too hot. If you want a rip-roaring fire, then this would be the time to light it...It just didn’t make sense to me. It didn’t compute...Very few Forest Service folks that I know will light off something like that in the middle of the fire season – too hot, and it will generate too much heat. All the fire behavior things [are indicating] ‘No, don’t do it!’ But they did it. End of story.” (Tribal Government respondent)

The sixth question (Q-6) enabled respondents to expand their assessment from specific incidents to an overall evaluation (likes and dislikes) of Yosemite’s Fire Management Program. Many respondents expressed a keen awareness of the difficult balancing act required of FMP personnel in improving forest health and public safety (primarily through prescribed burns) while not adversely affecting public health (through smoke generated during prescribed burns). When conditions are “right” to carry the smoke eastward over the Sierras and away from foothill gateway communities and San Joaquin Valley residents, people on the eastside complain to their air quality regulators and governmental representatives; when wind conditions change abruptly and smoke descends into foothill communities and the San Joaquin Valley, a veritable firestorm of public outcry pressures air quality regulators into taking immediate action requiring FMP personnel to “shut it down!” Various respondents also expressed the view that the FMP gets wrongly blamed by many San Joaquin Valley residents as being the chief culprit contributing to the Valley’s air pollution problems – when in reality the Valley’s particulate problems are primarily generated by the various industries and vehicles located therein. Several respondents also noted that Yosemite National Park is increasingly suffering from pollutants drifting up from the San Joaquin Valley.

Respondents, for the most part, are quite supportive of what the FMP is trying to do within YNP jurisdiction. The problem occurs when actions taken within the Park cross boundaries and impact residents and visitors beyond its borders. Various respondents expressed the view that FMP personnel lack sufficient sensitivity to the negative impacts of Park-generated smoke on people and places beyond Park boundaries. While the FMP is valued for its professional judgment and incorporation of scientific studies in carefully planning where, when and how much to burn, several respondents wished that its personnel would also incorporate some “common sense” and greater consideration of cultural and historical factors in their decision making processes. Others expressed the hope that FMP personnel would start providing the public with more detailed information sufficiently prior to a prescribed burn / smoke event (e.g., prior notification) so that residents and visitors could better determine appropriate actions to take.

An ongoing challenge noted by various respondents is the “revolving door” situation within YNP resulting in the fairly rapid turnover in administrative personnel – calling into question the advisability of spending time developing relationships with key YNP actors when in all probability they will just be passing through. Respondents are cognizant of the fact that this

structural issue has been somewhat ameliorated through establishment of the *Gateway Partners*, but also question the extent to which the Partners actually influence Park decisions:

“In the Park’s behalf, I think they’re doing a little better job of outreach the past couple of years than they’ve done before. That was always an issue – that the gateway communities never had much input. And it’s hard to judge how much impact the gateway communities have had. I know they’ve (e.g., the Park) got their plans pretty much laid out, and they know what they want to do. And they’re almost just throwing a bone to some of the local communities. And they change management, and they change people up there also. And just when you think someone’s making headway all of a sudden there’s a new guy taking his place...” (Media representative)

The seventh question (Q-7) asked respondents to share their understanding of fire’s role in the YNP ecosystem, and the extent to which fire influences forest health. Without exception, respondents were quite knowledgeable about the positive role played by fire in improving forest health; that fire is a natural part of the ecosystem; and that its careful use can be a very valuable tool in fuels reduction lessening the likelihood of worse fire events occurring in the future. One of the Tribal Government respondents summed up many respondents’ sentiments regarding fire’s role:

“It’s needed. It’s needed. It’s the way that they do it the traditional way – the way the Native Americans did it in the past. They probably have a lot prettier, cleaned out Park lands. I always believe that people do things because there’s a timing of it – and you’re living in the rhythm of Mother Nature. It’s ok to torch that off. It’s good for the land. It will open it up. And it’s good for the watershed not having the overgrown grasses, dead brush, and overabundance of small trees choking the meadows. It’s good for the plants and animals – plants so they can thrive; animals so they can thrive on the plants. It’s all connected. I’ve always felt like ‘yeah, why don’t they do it the Indian way.’ (Tribal Government respondent)

This high level of understanding regarding fire’s role in ecosystem improvement and forest health should not be surprising, given the fact respondents are fairly closely connected – whether through job responsibilities or personal experience – to Yosemite National Park. Many respondents have resided in the Yosemite region for decades, and have personally witnessed (for several, with devastating effects) the consequences of the former federal “*suppression*” policy towards forest fires that resulted in the built-up accumulation of woody debris on the forest floor quickly turning small blazes into resource-devouring infernos. Respondents clearly understand the need to reduce fuel loads; how such is done, however, is subject to differing interpretations (addressed later in this report).

The eighth question (Q-8) addressed respondent health impacts resulting from YNP fire management activities – whether naturally occurring or prescribed burns – during the recent past (defined as within the last 12-18 months). Three of the respondents stated that they had indeed been affected by smoke – two as the result of prior / continuing employment as fire fighters (both became asthmatic), and the third due to residence location lying directly in the path of prevailing winds carrying smoke from Yosemite fire events.

While most respondents had not been personally affected by FMP activities, they were quick to add that many of their constituents – be they senior citizens in bordering mountain counties (where a significant percentage of the total population is elderly), San Joaquin Valley youth (a

large percentage of whom are afflicted with asthma and allergies), Chamber of Commerce members (dependent upon tourism), or domestic and international visitors to Yosemite – were not appreciative of such efforts, particularly during the summer tourist season:

“Last year there were a couple of control burns that were in the area that did impact me (smoke). So...it didn’t cause any problems for me – as far as breathing – but it made me want to stay inside as opposed to eating my lunch outside. Guests are a different story: we have people who either have asthma or emphysema, or whatever breathing-type of disorders. And for them, it really is an impact. A lot of them book a year in advance; a lot of them – especially in the summertime – we can be 40% international. So we’ve got people who have come from Europe, or Asia, or wherever, from thousands and thousands of miles, and they get here and then they can’t stay, because of the impact of the smoke.” (Business & Tourism respondent).

It appears that most mountain county residents are somewhat more forgiving of smoke impacts as long as the event is of short (less than two weeks) duration. They tend to view smoke as an unpleasant yet relatively short-term intrusive inconvenience necessary for improved forest health and the likely lessening of future catastrophic fires reaching gateway community residents.

Among the thirty-eight respondents were three (all connected to Environmental NGOs) directly involved in reviewing scientific literature and analyzing public policy ramifications of smoke on people. Their basic message was that smoke should not be taken so lightly by FMP personnel:

“We’ve talked a little bit about the health impacts of smoke from fires – whether they’re wildfires or prescribed burns. These are fairly short-term events and we don’t get too hung up on them. But, there are studies out there that show that they can have tremendous impacts to asthmatics and people with respiratory illness. And they can cause – the acute particulate exposure that occurs can cause other health events. Particulate matters can be deadly. It is associated with premature mortality, heart attacks, other cardiac illnesses, all sorts of respiratory illnesses (emphysema, bronchitis, asthma, asthmatic symptoms of coughing, wheezing) and on down. There are so many – even birth defects, and adverse birth outcomes associated with particulate exposure...So this is pretty serious. And when we have a choice (as a society) about when and where we’re going to burn something to control and manage the forest, I think that it’s very important to give the community enough of a heads-up that they can make arrangements so that if there are sensitive individuals and they want to leave for several weeks (or however long it takes) that they can make those arrangements, and not just have – and I don’t know of a situation that applies right now. But I would hope that they wouldn’t have a phone caller, or a little tiny notice in an obscure newspaper the day before – that they would have ample time to make appropriate plans.” (Environmental NGO respondent)

The call for advanced notification to those affected by smoke was echoed by an air quality regulator who clearly understood smoke’s negative impacts on a small percentage of the population:

“No matter what you do, they’re going to be opposed to any smoke. And the approach we take is, we communicate with them A LOT. I inform them of everything we’re doing when we put smoke in the air, and why. And oftentimes, they’ll leave the area if they know well enough in advance; they’ll just get out of the area and head someplace where there isn’t smoke. So yes we

over here are affected by smoke generated on the west side; in some respects it has undermined some good fire in the ecosystem education we've done.” (Agency respondent)

Respondent suggestions regarding FMP communications to affected publics are addressed later in this report.

The ninth question (Q-9) was only asked of those respondents who had been personally affected by smoke, and was worded “How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?” The few who responded tended to close their windows and stay indoors whenever possible. One’s “tolerance” of smoke appeared to depend upon proximity to as well as duration of the event (with 10 days to two weeks being the tipping point when smoke then became “intolerable” and respondents took action via complaints to their County Supervisor, their county / regional air quality regulatory agency, or higher up the political ladder).

At this point, interview questions shifted from respondent assessment of Yosemite’s ongoing Fire Management Program to suggestions regarding what that program should consider continuing, changing or incorporating in the future. The tenth question (Q-10) asked if respondents had “any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.” Respondent suggestions tended to cluster into three general themes: interagency collaboration and coordination; greater YNP administrative sensitivity to local impacts of FMP activities on gateway counties, communities, and residents; and better communication (public education and outreach) between YNP and those individuals traveling to, or affected by, FMP activities occurring within the Park.

Elaboration of each theme follows. (*Note: respondents would expand upon these themes in answering the next question (Q-11) regarding specific actions they wished to see taken in order to move the existing FMP to their preferred future state*).

- **Interagency Collaboration and Coordination**

For some respondents, this term referred specifically to those agencies having fire and land management responsibilities within and bordering Yosemite National Park; while for others it included local and regional air quality regulators as well as the California Department of Transportation (*Cal Trans*) responsible for electronic messaging on primary traffic corridors leading to Yosemite. The general perception expressed was that the various agencies would benefit through greater face-to-face interaction by their representatives on a regular basis:

“There needs to be a collaborative interagency fire management program – not just within the Park, but a regional approach to this problem since it clearly involves County, State of California, and at least 3 federal agencies in and around Yosemite. Somehow, it’s as if fire management only exists up in Yosemite. There’s this real huge perception that the surrounding federal agencies and state agencies, and local communities are not collaborating.” (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

“My impression is that isn’t happening really well. I don’t know the details about the fire program in the Park to know to what extent – there is such an overlap of fire management

(National Park land, Forest Service land, and BLM land) boundaries. If you've got management all around you, there's really a great opportunity for collaboration for learning lessons. The Forest Service (with CEQA and NEPA requirements) seems to get really stuck. And I think any collaboration offers ways for us to work together, and seems really critical." (Environmental NGO respondent)

Respondents would like such interaction to occur prior to and following each fire season, so that proposed plans could be shared and discussed – and identified problems occurring during the fire season debriefed for collective consideration. One of the Agency respondents suggested that perhaps the existing *Sierra Wildland Fire Reporting System* (<http://sierrafire.cr.usgs.gov/swfrs/>) could be revamped and expanded to serve as this coordinating entity, since its membership already includes Yosemite and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Parks as well as the three National Forests (e.g., Stanislaus, Sierra and Inyo) in the Yosemite region.

- **Greater Sensitivity by YNP Administration to Fire Management Program Impacts on Gateway Counties, Communities and Residents**

Many respondents expressed varying degrees of frustration over the Park's perceived policy of reducing fuel loads at all costs – especially when it meant serious disruption (e.g., road closures, loss of tourism, negative impact on tourist-dependent local economies) when fire and smoke events occurred during summer months. This concern continually resurfaced during the interviews. What respondents suggested be done is fairly straightforward: not schedule any prescribed burns during peak season holiday weekends (e.g., Memorial Day, Fourth of July, and Labor Day). The expressed preference was for no prescribed burning being done during the week prior to each holiday weekend.

Several respondents suggested that the Fire Management Program be modified to encourage smaller prescribed burns (thus generating less smoke over a shorter time period); rely more extensively on mechanical means for fuels reduction (so that removed fuels could later be incorporated in a biomass program for energy generation, local employment, etc.); and burning from the top of hill downward towards the roadway to reduce collateral damage in sensitive areas:

"It's simple: start at the top, not at the bottom. Because if you start at the top, fire burns downhill slowly. But if you start at the bottom where it's convenient (because it's along a roadway) it's going to mount beyond what you would envision you would like to accomplish by a control burn. It's tougher that way, but I think the only way it will work. I have been through too many years of watching all of this happen, and not seeing the benefits that can happen." (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

Several other suggestions were directed more towards YNP Administration than FMP personnel. The first suggestion encouraged consideration of a day use pass for local residents considerably less expensive than the current purchase price for an entrance permit that could be utilized whenever a local resident (and family members) wished to enjoy lunch, dinner or a special event within the Park. The second encouraged consideration for shifting many if not all of Yosemite's administrative functions out of the Valley and into one or more gateway communities:

“I think the Park Service ought to move its administration to Mariposa. They’re looking at a piece of land now. And I think that would do two things: that would create less congestion for commuters (a lot of people are employed by the Park Service who could be employed right here in town). Safety is increased. Quality of life is increased for those employees. There’s all kinds of things. The second thing is that it brings the Park Service here, which makes it touchable for those who don’t work for the Park Service. And so now, those people are part of this community. It creates a greater understanding of what they do all day long. They’re not just up in the Park having a good time. I think it would help create better understanding. The third thing is what it does to the visitor experience. Because now, we have a link. If those people stop here first -- because I believe a visitor’s center is part of the plan – now Mariposa isn’t a stopping point, but this is a starting point to your Park experience. You stop here first. It’s like the preview, the movie trailer before the feature film. You stop to get some information, you get some maps, and then you go into the Park. So you have some time to digest that, and it makes for a better visitor experience all the way around. And it’s good economically as well...” (Media respondent)

• Public Education and Outreach

This theme extends the “*collaboration and coordination*” concept from just agencies to all stakeholder groups and organizations affected by FMP policies and programs. Respondents expressed the desire to become engaged with Yosemite’s administrative and FMP personnel in active and ongoing dialogues (e.g., multi-directional communication) – through periodic meetings with local residents [town meetings], County Government, Chambers of Commerce, Town Planning Councils, Environmental NGOs, Tribal Government or the Media occurring on respondents’ home turf:

“I think they should adopt public outreach. The hardest thing that any of us do in government is to get the public engaged. We have our scoping meetings (and we had one in Groveland a while back and we had 15-20 people there). That was a good outreach, and the Park is doing a lot better at it. But they could have a seminar on prescribed burning for the gateway communities. Not everybody can attend Yosemite Partners Gateway, but have a video just like we’ve done with Pine Mountain Lake (on keeping your house fire safe) to play at the Chamber of Commerce meetings. We have a public service channel. Let’s have the Park Service put a video on the public service channel to show what prescribed burning does. That would reach 4,000 to 5,000 people. The Park Service needs to get the information out so people are informed.” (County Government respondent)

Respondents also expressed the need for improvements in electronic communication between the Park (whether through media releases / email updates or with information posted on its website) and its various publics. As previously noted: many respondents feel the Park’s electronic delivery mechanisms reach too few people, are difficult to navigate, do not provide the reader with sufficient “*context*” regarding fire events’ desired impacts, and lack timeliness:

“I would say, probably the most important thing would be media releases and communications. Those are probably the biggest issues. If they [Yosemite National Park spokespeople] don’t want to be misrepresented, if they don’t want to be misquoted, misunderstood...all the above, then the more information that’s given out, the better it will be received. But now when people see smoke, they think “oh, somebody’s doing something wrong.” And the reality is, if they’re

looking for a public image to try to improve it, information is always the best product.” (A different County Government respondent)

Another recommendation focused on expanding the use of “Reverse 911” from emergency-only communication with individual households within a geographical location to include the potential for daily updates on fire and smoke events:

“So what happened when we got evacuated [due to the Big Meadows Fire], I think they used the reverse 911 system, so that everyone got the same – so that everyone who has a phone got called by the Sheriff recording saying ‘be prepared for a possible evacuation within the next 24 hours....’ So I would think that could be utilized even more frequently. Even a daily update. I don’t know how expensive or difficult it is, but in these days of computers, I would assume that they [could] make a recording, and then press a few buttons – pick the town boundaries that they want to inform – and the machine then phones to leave the messages. That might be a way to get you more information, and people could opt out. People could opt out. You could say, “Do you want daily updates, or just the emergency updates?”... . So I think that if everyone with telephones could have a choice of all the updates, only the emergency updates, only fire-related updates, or something like that...It’s a way to reach more people.” (Town Planning Advisory Council / Local Resident respondent)

The eleventh question (Q-11) asked respondents to propose any specific actions “to move the Fire Management Program from where it is now to where you would like it to be in the future.” Given the large number of suggestions offered (many of which were proposed in considerable detail), readers are encouraged to refer to actual transcripts²³ for additional information regarding the various recommendations encapsulated below:

1. No prescribed burns the week prior to and during the three summer holiday weekends

This recommendation was proposed by a majority of respondents for many of the reasons previously noted in this report. Such a “good neighbor” policy if enacted would provide a much more positive and pleasant experience for visitors traveling to Yosemite National Park during peak periods, lessen the likelihood of negative financial impacts occurring to local economies, and perhaps most importantly: send a clear message that YNP administration / FMP personnel not only acknowledge this widespread public concern but have taken appropriate action to address it.

While it is quite likely this recommendation has been previously proposed by various individuals to YNP administration and FMP personnel, this study suggests there is a strong collective sentiment desiring the change be enacted as soon as possible. The PI encountered considerable respondent frustration over the “perceived” fact that YNP administration “didn’t get it,” and engaged in activities with “obliviousness” to local sentiments and impacts:

“What I proposed when I met with the [former] Park Superintendent and also spoke to the District Forest Supervisor in Groveland, that because of the economic problems that happen if a fire gets away, to not light a fire on a three-day holiday. The risk is too great, in my opinion. And it totally destroys the economy. On the Highway 120 corridor, there are people that are still

²³included as Attachments 4-10.

trying to recover from the loss of income from that [2009 Big Meadows Fire] three-day weekend. People were leaving the hotels, the road (Highway 120) was closed completely. So if you've come from Germany or England, or wherever, and you got to Tuolumne County. So, how do you feel about Tuolumne County now? Your taste in the mouth is not very good about Tuolumne County. And that's our county's number one income source (tourism)... So, what would be wrong with saying 'we don't want to affect these people economically. So in order not to do that, let's not burn three times a year, three weeks out of the year. Let's put a big black line on those weeks (Memorial Day, 4th of July, Labor Day).' I know this eliminates some of the windows they have for prescribed burning, but it completely takes the economic issue away. You can live with not having a few customers in the next following week, since those are the slowest weeks. You anticipate that. Let's look at that as our prime window... Those three times. Because that's what the people who are in the tourist industry want. All of the small businesses are geared to that: they staff to it. If a small business closes down because there isn't any business, there's five people out of work..." (County Government respondent)

2. Development of more effective partnerships with FMP stakeholders

While most respondents expressed awareness of the *Gateway Partners* program involving YNP administration and FMP personnel interacting on a quarterly basis with various stakeholder representatives in Yosemite Valley, several noted concerns about meeting location, extent of participation, and absence of meaningful dialogue. Their perception was that *Gateway Partners* meetings were by invitation only and designed primarily for one-way (updates and information sharing) communication from YNP representatives to those present. Their suggestion is that the "*Gateway Partners*" concept be expanded to include a greater diversity of affected stakeholders (for example, County and Regional Air Quality regulators, Environmental NGOs, Town Planning Advisory Councils, Concerned Citizens, and Tribal Governments) working closely together to improve coordination, enhance communication and begin building lasting relationships throughout the Yosemite region. Such meetings could rotate among gateway communities and Yosemite Valley, thus providing greater opportunities for dialogue among an increased number of participants. Respondents cited two recent models for YNP consideration: The Sierra Nevada Conservancy's *Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative* (www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov/snfc_i_home.html) and the *Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative* (<http://sites.google.com/site/sustainablesierragroup2/>):

"Listen... to the citizens. Listening to the people that it's going to affect. Using that information (from listening to them), and combine that into the fire management... listen and try your best to implement into your fire management program the concerns of the outside (outside the National Park)... You don't do this overnight. But you start this process. You build relationships with the people in the process, and you get the average citizen to be more relaxed..." (Business & Tourism respondent).

Additional suggestions focused more narrowly on one or more collaborative ventures between FMP personnel and the media (in developing feature stories); county governments (in establishing biomass facilities to convert fuels taken off Park lands into local jobs and additional sources of energy; expansion of the YARTS regional public transportation system between gateway communities and the Park); various agencies (to develop housing facilities for YNP employees in or near gateway communities; with Cal Trans to coordinate the wording to be posted on electronic signs / placement of informational Rangers located along the major

corridors leading into Yosemite during fire events); and tribal governments (to incorporate more of a spiritual component via tribal elder involvement at the beginning of the prescribed burning season). The last suggestion would provide an historical and cultural connection between FMP activities and their intended outcomes:

“I’d like to see a lot of the traditional fire (the way it was done way back) – how they actually had fires done – rather than just going out and burning. I know! They don’t want to have tribal people there to actually have the fire, but they could do the start of that fire. Invite your tribal people in. Because that was the thing that the tribes did – was take care of their area. And to have that come back...” (Tribal Government respondent)

3. Utilize new technology to “connect” FMP information to more publics

Several previous findings noted respondent concern regarding content, clarity and timeliness of FMP information currently being delivered via email updates and web site postings. This recommendation builds upon those concerns by proposing that YNP / FMP personnel responsible for extending information beyond Park boundaries seriously consider developing links (“*linking in*”) to local stakeholder websites (for example, to county governments, gateway visitors’ centers, local and regional air quality regulators, federal and state agencies, tribal governments, chambers of commerce, and the media) to increase the likelihood of information (such as FMP burn schedules for the coming season) quickly reaching desired destinations. Such communications would be fairly brief, cover questions likely to be asked by the reader, provide illustrative graphics and also include embedded links to other sites where more detailed information could be found:

“What we would love to have – and we’d only probably honestly use this when there is visible smoke here in the Mono Basin – is you go to a web page and there is a satellite photo that either itself is clear about the fire and the smoke plume...And then maybe have some very simple information with it – like how long the fire has been burning; or what kind of approach is being taken to it, and so forth... This is really oriented to people walking in [to the gateway visitor center] and checking on what is happening in less than two minutes. A home user I presume would click maybe on and find out the details of what’s been deployed...but that’s all you’re going to get them for. You’ve got ten or fifteen seconds to explain what the Park’s reaction is, and why, and leave people with the impression they have. Which is that someone is on top of it, there’s some logic to whatever it is they’re doing, and the trip’s going to be fine. I think the kinds of things on people’s minds are: ‘What started the fire?’ ‘Are they doing something about it?’ Maybe the philosophy for the wilderness area of just letting it burn. They just want to know ‘where is it in relation to my travel plans?’ And, if they are doing something about it, there’s usually some interest in the scope of that response – probably not so much in dollars (because that gets everybody all agitated), but if there’s an exciting helicopter shot or something like that, you can use that too...” (Environmental NGO respondent)

Several respondents suggested that FMP personnel utilize new technology (such as facebook, twitter, and development of web backgrounds that can be tracked by GPS and search web sites) for access by travelers en route to Yosemite National Park:

“I think you have to take a combination of approaches. We change as a society – so you still have that older generation that watches the news, and reads the newspaper. But you have

Generation X and Generation Y and they're on facebook and twitter and things that are probably already out there, but you and I aren't aware of. So, even if you're just redirecting them to whatever outlets you do have. It's important to use what society is using; if society is on facebook and twitter we need to get on there. We tend to continue to talk to ourselves, and people of our own age bracket. We really need to tell the rest of producing society what we're doing – the twenties and thirties crowd...” (Agency respondent)

4. Expansion of FMP education and training programs within schools and throughout gateway communities

Several respondents who were knowledgeable about the fire education program for elementary school students within Yosemite National Park developed by FMP personnel (under Taro Pusina's leadership) expressed the view that the program needed to be expanded beyond Park boundaries, since it has been proven extremely effective at creating greater understanding and awareness among participating students (as well as their parents and siblings) of fire's role in the ecosystem and teaching effective ways of living in a fire-prone environment.

Other respondents suggested the need for FMP consideration of developing a training program (taught by seasoned professionals utilizing the most current and scientifically-sound information) for local volunteer educators who would then share their learning with the public both within and beyond Park boundaries.

5. Greater recognition by FMP personnel that fire impacts extend beyond the crest of the Sierra Nevada

As previously noted, interview-generated information from the thirty-eight participants was compiled by affiliation as well as geographic location – with affiliation serving as the sole data analysis vehicle owing to the PI's belief (coupled with experience) that one's organizational connection tends to provide greater respondent insight regarding FMP impacts due to the fact those impacts usually extend beyond individuals to also affect their respective colleagues. At times, however, attention paid to respondents' geographic location can provide insights useful for consideration by FMP personnel.

In reviewing responses from the nine individuals residing along the eastern slope of the Sierra Nevada it became clear those participants felt their “*out of sight, out of mind*” location greatly contributed to lack of YNP administrative / FMP personnel attention. The problem is that Yosemite-generated smoke recognizes no jurisdictional boundaries, and regularly drifts across the mountains into the Mono Basin and beyond to impact residents and visitors alike. Just because their relative population numbers are few (in comparison to the number of people living in the San Joaquin Valley who would be affected when winds carry smoke towards the west) does not mean their concerns are not valid. These respondents are of one voice in recommending that YNP administration make greater effort to “*connect*” with the eastern side of the Park, and do it soon.

The twelfth question (Q-12) asked respondents “*what would be your concerns if what you proposed is not acted upon?*” Regardless of individual proposal specificity, the general sentiment expressed by respondents was that the Fire Management Program's failure to act would be a “*missed opportunity*” for educating its diverse stakeholders regarding why its various

activities are so important to long-term forest health and greater public safety. Several respondents laid out the following scenario likely to “play out” if the FMP continues falling short in sending out timely and meaningful information to the people: greater numbers of the “disgruntled” public will begin losing confidence in the FMP’s ability to carry out its mission; attacks on the fire management program will escalate; increased restrictions will be placed by local and regional air quality regulators on FMP activities; and ultimately the Yosemite region will witness larger and more damaging catastrophic wildfires.

Respondents were quick to add that the kind of “education” they had in mind was collaborative in nature – where FMP personnel were engaged in ongoing dialogues with representatives directly impacted by program actions:

“I think the less information that’s shared, and the less dialogue there is, the longer these problems will go on, and the longer it will take for anything to change. Because a lot of the work that it takes to change people’s behavior is sharing information and getting them to think about a perspective that’s outside of their own. And the only way that they’re going to be exposed to that is through public dialogue. In my work, I’ve experienced a sense of ‘entitlement’ from agencies, of like ‘well we’re here to serve; and if the public wants something, then they need to come to us.’ But my reality in working with the public is that everybody is really busy; they’re way stressed for time. And if you say ‘fire management in Yosemite,’ most people’s eyes are going to glaze over. That doesn’t sound really exciting...So I think if the dialogue doesn’t happen, then not only will it take longer for the problem to be solved – but there’s huge potential that the problem will just get worse and worse and worse, and will never get better. Because people will never understand the way that all of these issues overlap with each other. You know, their decision to be a single person driving in a car to Yosemite – or driving around the Valley floor – how those issues are interrelated to each other. If people are not exposed to that idea, or that thought’s not put into their heads somehow, then they’re not going to think about it.”
(Environmental NGO respondent)

The thirteenth question (Q-13) asked respondents “How do you see yourself personally involved in bringing about your suggested changes?” Respondents overwhelmingly expressed a desire and commitment to working closely with YNP administration and FMP personnel on issues affecting their agencies, organizations, members and residents. For some respondents, such commitment is already being fulfilled through their ongoing involvement in quarterly *Gateway Partners* meetings. Several others stated *Gateway Partners* could fulfill this need if its membership were expanded, more attention were devoted to fire management education, and some of its meetings were held in gateway communities (providing greater opportunity for YNP and FMP interaction with local residents). Other respondents expressed the need for more interagency interaction (e.g., more structured and frequent interaction occurring prior to and following annual burn seasons) between US Forest Service and Park Service Administrators and their respective Fire Management Officers, since “our communication certainly isn’t what it should be.” Another respondent viewed his personal role as encouraging YNP administration and FMP personnel to consider appointing a “go to” person (skilled in personal and electronic communication) quickly able to respond to public concerns:

“We do get a lot of communication from the Park, but some of it is just the standard ‘this is what happened today.’ It seems like in crisis management mode, we could be better about the back and forth communication with their PR folks. I don’t know if the Park has a crisis management

person; if they did that would be helpful to us. If there was a point person who could direct us. 'Here's a person you could talk to. You might want to go and check this area out.' That would be helpful to us." (Media respondent)

The fourteenth question (**Q-14**) asked respondents “*Would you be interested in participating in facilitated dialogues with Fire Management Program staff and other interested people concerning fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding area? If so, do you have any suggestions regarding how you would like such dialogues to be organized and facilitated?*” While the vast majority of respondents expressed such interest, individual interpretation of “*facilitated dialogues*” varied considerably. For some, such interaction best occurred through public meetings; for others it involved “*up close and personal*” dialogue with one or more Yosemite Administrative or FMP representatives on issues of specific interest to constituents; and yet other respondents expressed a need for “*hands on*” experiences (such as personally observing prescribed fire events; or participating in FMP-led follow-up fire tours to assess impacts of previous actions) as their preferred engagement mechanism. Several respondents also highlighted the potential of electronic communication for reaching visitors and connecting individuals with real-time activities within the Park. In sum: the message clearly conveyed is that since “*dialogue*” can occur in various forms and ways, FMP personnel would be wise to utilize a variety of approaches for engaging the public in fire and smoke management issues.

The following responses illustrate the range, and richness, of participant suggestions regarding improved FMP engagement with its various stakeholders:

via web site

“I think this is one of the things I really wish...that more people knew. And maybe, right when you go to the Park’s website, it pops up – ‘these are the upcoming public workshops or meetings or comments periods or whatever.’ Because right now, you have to dig into what’s going on – especially with things that are controversial, or bigger, to really make an effort to get it out that way. I think they do, probably, newspaper ads of some sort, but I don’t know if I’ve ever seen one. So I would definitely try to get it into the local media...I don’t think there’s a great ‘reaching out’ to the general public to let them know about the opportunities. It seems like it’s a very focused sort of list that they have (all the usual suspects) and there’s not necessarily reaching beyond that very much...Obviously, it’s hard!” (Environmental NGO respondent)

“Again, things can happen in the National Park that are safety related that, if they are put up in a certain type of web background, the GPSs and the search web sites will track them and disseminate that information... And that happens all automatically over the web system. And so another way to expand on that: if we had some kind of fire management issue (smoke, or fire, or even a road condition) if that information was published in a certain profile, and tracking services could track it, a guy like me if I’m driving down the road – I could actually put in a request for anything Yosemite traffic-related in the next 50 hours (because I’m driving to the area) and that information would drop into my IPOD or whatever else I was using. And that connection would get information out to the public faster. Much faster.” (Business & Tourism respondent)

via workshops and events

“I’d like to see – maybe twice a year – a media review. A media day. Where we the media would go into the Park and get the latest. Call it ‘Yosemite Press 101’ or whatever. Because there are so many issues, and we have such limited staff. And that would also branch off to some parts for future story ideas. We could go up there and get something. Like ‘we’re getting ready to go into fire season, and here’s our plan for how we do this; this is how we manage it.’ Or, ‘we’re going to do a remodel of the Ahwahnee Hotel, by the way, and here’s what’s involved. Here’s the background.’ We would be able to get all that first-hand. And we would ask questions, and have a two-way engagement. And we could meet the team up there... Maybe early spring (March) looking at the summer and then maybe during the summer (August) looking at the winter, and what some of the issues are... But again, it’s not just the press releases and handouts! It’s the one-on-one time being able to sit there and talk with them and interview them and find out a little more detail. This would be a little more structured and organized maybe...”
(Media respondent)

via incorporating the public into meetings

“We hear all the time how hard it is to reach the public. And being a community organizer, I understand that it’s very difficult to reach the public. I’ve also seen how much of a difference it makes when you go out to the public and share information with them. And for me, what I found was it was the easiest to do it when it was complementary to what somebody else was working on.

I mean, there are tons of groups and organizations, and parent associations, that are meeting all the time. And all it takes is getting on their calendar and coming for five minutes and saying ‘Look. This is our situation in the Park. These are the problems that we’re having. Here’s where we need your help. And here’s what we’re doing to help you.’ And just have that exchange. And again, similar to this: people will raise up their own solutions to the problem that may be better than the people who are working in it because they’re so used to it that they wouldn’t think of that idea...In my experience, I’ve witnessed that agencies tend to be really good at having relationships with each other – and inviting each other to things. And I think the real added benefit that coalitions like the one that I work for right now bring, is that we do have some of the community-level perspective, we do have organizations that are working at the grass-roots level, and we do also have staff people of member organizations that can operate at a little bit higher level of the public. So, I think including groups like ours would add a huge benefit, because then you’re getting a little bit of diversity and perspective... We don’t come with that perspective (that we’re always here to protest). We want to be a part of those dialogues, and at the same time we’re not always invited. And so I think that is part of why decision-making is getting further away from the public, because it’s becoming focused on regulatory agencies, and it’s not including the public so much anymore...”
(Environmental NGO respondent)

The fifteenth question (**Q-15**) asked respondents “Would you be interested in having someone from the Fire Management Program contact you to discuss your concerns and ideas?” The vast majority (twenty-seven respondents) indicated that would not be necessary, since those contacts were already in place – and could easily be accessed through electronic communication or by

picking up one's phone. Contact information²⁴ on the eleven respondents requesting personal dialogues with FMP personnel has previously been compiled by the PI and electronically submitted to the Chief of Fire & Aviation Management for follow-up.

The sixteenth question (**Q-16**) asked respondents “*Would you be interested in receiving more detailed information describing the Park's current guidelines governing decision-making?*” Review of respondent comments failed to encounter any “*burning desire*” for such information. Many respondents expressed the view that information regarding how decisions are made should be posted on an improved Park web site²⁵ for easy access by those interested.

The seventeenth question (**Q-17**) provided opportunity for respondent synthesis of previous comments into a “*take away*” message for Yosemite administration and FMP personnel consideration: “*If \$10 million dollars were to become available for use within the Yosemite region and you were the person able to decide just how those funds would be used, how would you spend them? While your priority might focus exclusively on Yosemite's Fire Management Program, please don't feel limited in your response.*”

Most responses to this question tended to mirror previous findings associated with **Q-10** (*vision of the future*) and **Q-11** (*specific actions*) – improved communication and collaboration through strengthened partnerships; public education and outreach; infrastructure (e.g., bricks and mortar projects addressing current Park problems in buildings, transportation, roads, bathrooms, water and septic systems, etc.); and expanded options for fuels management (e.g., hiring of tribal youth to work on timber stand improvement and fuels reduction). Several respondents, however, framed the latter suggestion in terms of prescribed fires adding carbon to the atmosphere – thus contributing to climate change and global warming. Their recommendations centered around the need for the FMP expanding upon its current scientific investigations and technological innovations addressing fuels reduction through pilot projects assessing new approaches to prescribed burning (such as burning from hilltops down to the highway) along with the non-burning of forest fuels (via chipping or biomass removal offsite for energy generation). The challenge for YNP administration and FMP personnel then becomes one of determining what constitutes a “*reasonable balance*” in addressing forest health and public safety concerns while various stakeholder groups are pushing one approach to the exclusion of others...

Might the following be an answer? Many respondents re-emphasized the need for YNP administration and FMP personnel seizing the initiative and promoting ongoing dialogue with representatives of affected publics as the initial step to be taken. While some prefer such dialogue occurring primarily between FMP personnel and their counterparts in other Federal and State agencies (e.g., inter-agency collaboration and coordination), others profess the desire for a “*more level playing field*” in which agency and non-agency representative alike meet regularly to improve communication, begin building lasting relationships, and start developing outreach programs – which might ultimately lead to effective partnerships in which participants actively engage in fire and smoke education and promote this approach to ever-widening audiences.

²⁴ limited to each respondent's name, telephone number, and email address.

²⁵ Respondent assessment of the Park's web site has previously been addressed in this report. Specific responses to this question added two additional web sites recommended for emulation by Yosemite administration and FMP personnel: the Sierra Nevada Alliance (www.sierranevadaalliance.org) and Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park's fire site (www.nps.gov/seki/naturescience.fire/htm).

The eighteenth and final question (**Q-18**) asked respondents “*Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you’d like to add?*” Few additional comments were elicited from this question. Study participants who did respond tended to re-emphasize what had previously been stated in addressing **Q-10** (vision of the future), **Q-11** (specific actions to be taken) or **Q-17** (what should be funded). One comment in particular seems to sum up respondent appreciation over being included in the potential reshaping of future FMP activities in the Yosemite region:

“With climate change, we are already seeing more forest fires – and we expect to see the situation intensify. We expect to see many more forest fires, many more acres burned, every year over time – due to climate change. And so, I applaud you for doing this work. I think that the situation will only become more difficult – and so the planning and forethought that you’re working on now is pretty key, especially considering that no matter what we do at this point in time, due to climate change we’re already seeing more fires and more acres burning. And we see this more and more impacting residential areas. And we might talk about reasons why (encroachment of residential areas, more fires in general, or whatever the reason is) more and more residential areas are impacted. And so I appreciate the work that you’re doing...What happened around Moscow and throughout Russia last summer is sort of a warning sign for us.”
(Environmental NGO respondent)

VI. Recommendations

The following respondent-based recommendations provide a range of opportunities for strengthening and expanding upon existing YNP administrative and FMP relationships with those affected by Park actions. While some recommendations could be relatively easy to implement, others may not be feasible at the present time. Please note these recommendations are based upon a study whose primary purpose was “*to understand stakeholder perceptions of fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park.*”

Since these respondents do not necessarily represent the general population due to the fact that they were not selected at random from that population, their expressed perceptions should not be extrapolated – and their views should only be attributed to themselves. One should use caution in assuming that the opinions stated within this report represent more broadly held views.

While “*perceptions*” can certainly differ between individuals as well as within stakeholder agencies, organizations and groups (e.g., affiliations), this study has identified several overarching issues those interviewed suggest need attention – including: improved interaction with the public via face-to-face meetings in localities (gateway communities); more timely and educational media releases (along with other forms of new technology to better connect with the traveling public); an improved website; expansion of Gateway Partners membership to include affected stakeholders on both sides of the Sierra Nevada; improved inter-agency communication and collaboration; and greater sensitivity by YNP administration and FMP personnel to local economic impacts resulting from their unintended actions. These issues are addressed through various recommendations (**REC**) listed below. If Park and Fire Managers wish to address the concerns of the thirty-eight participants in this study, they might consider the following recommendations:

REC 1 Develop Effective Interaction and Engagement between YNP Administration and FMP Personnel with Study Participants as Soon as Possible

Once YNP Administration and FMP personnel have had the opportunity to review the report and meet with the PI to discuss its findings and recommendations, it is suggested that the names and contact information for all study participants be added to the list of those currently receiving electronic updates (particularly fire updates) from the Park. In addition, it is suggested that each study participant be personally invited to the next quarterly meeting of the Gateway Partners at which the PI will present this report to the membership. Lastly, it is suggested that a FMP representative accompany the PI to various regional locations (previously requested by study participants) and collaborate with him in sharing report highlights with interested publics during the coming summer.²⁶

REC 2 Utilize a Range of Electronic Technology Approaches in Communicating FMP Information to the Public

Study participants have expressed considerable concern over the content, clarity and timeliness of FMP information currently being delivered via email updates and web site postings. They have also suggested that FMP personnel utilize new technology (such as facebook and twitter) for easier access by travelers en route to the Park. This second recommendation encourages YNP administrative establishment of a task group (including at least one FMP representative along with representation from Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park,²⁷ Cal Trans²⁸ and several study participants knowledgeable about the level and length of information sought by various publics) to assess the Park's existing messaging system and make specific recommendations on its improvement.

REC 3 FMP Initiation of Regularly Scheduled Dialogues with Counterparts in other Agencies (including County Governments and Regional Air Pollution Control Districts)

Various study participants have expressed the desire for greater inter-agency collaboration, cooperation and coordination so that all agencies involved in multi-jurisdictional fire situations²⁹ have a clearer understanding of the decision-making process utilized by others. Given such information, it should be possible to improve existing protocols regarding each participating agency's role and responsibility, and thus improve overall response effectiveness during actual fire events. Respondents suggest that the FMP convene at least two meetings each year – one prior to the beginning of fire season (to discuss each agency's plans) and another at its conclusion (to assess how those plans were implemented as well as identify potential modifications in future activities). Respondents encouraged the FMP to expand the "inter-agency" concept beyond existing fire management and land management agencies to include direct involvement with neighboring counties as well as local and regional air pollution control districts. It was also suggested that the FMP identify a crisis management person who the public

²⁶ including but not limited to town planning advisory councils in Mariposa County; gateway communities (Oakhurst, Mariposa, Groveland, and Lee Vining); tribal councils; and federal agencies.

²⁷ preferably Deb Schweizer.

²⁸ specifically someone involved in the wording of messages placed on electronic reader boards located along each major travel corridor to the Park.

²⁹ such as the 2009 Big Meadows Fire.

(especially the media) could contact for the latest updates on fire events within the Park or close to its borders.³⁰

REC 4 Expand FMP’s Options for Fuels Reduction

As previous findings have shown, participants in this study are very supportive of the FMP’s mission to reduce fuel loads within Park boundaries, and hold its personnel in high esteem. Interview transcripts are replete with accolades for its highly-trained and seasoned professionals doing the very best they can to strike the right balance between reducing accumulated fuels as quickly as possible while simultaneously not creating – or adding to – health concerns for visitors and residents alike.

While FMP personnel are highly regarded, several of their practices have come under increased respondent scrutiny. The first is more of a “*big picture*” concern – that current prescribed burning practices add carbon to the atmosphere...and contribute – albeit infinitesimally – to global warming. Another concern expressed dealt with the current FMP practice of lighting prescribed burns along roadways that all-to-often result in collateral damage to larger trees as those fires race uphill. Yet a third dealt with the amount and duration of smoke generated by prescribed fires burning large acreages over a period of time.

Some respondents would like to see the FMP develop / expand upon alternatives to burning³¹ that include chipping of fuels (that could be used on trails), selective logging, hauling of fuels offsite for bio-energy generation; others suggest reducing the size of units to be burned so that smoke events last no longer than a week; another recommends that the FMP initiate a pilot prescribed burning project whereby the “*burning downhill to the road*” recommendation can be compared and evaluated to the current approach. The above suggestions are offered in a collaborative spirit; respondents hope these ideas will be seriously considered and tested – as time and available resources allow.

REC 5 FMP Initiation of a “No Prescribed Burning Policy” during Weeks Preceding and Including each Summer Holiday Weekend

Various findings have already touched on the devastating economic impacts experienced by local economies whenever prescribed burns get out of control. While study participants clearly recognized the vital role played by FMP personnel in improving forest health and public safety through fuels reduction activities, they also expressed considerable frustration and exasperation over YNP administration’s perceived refusal to take local situations into account when developing annual prescribed burning schedules. Respondents have specifically requested that no prescribed burns occur during the weeks leading up to, and including, Memorial Day weekend, 4th of July weekend, and Labor Day weekend. Were such a “*good neighbor policy*” initiated by the FMP, it would most likely engender considerable good will throughout gateway communities and counties if this dramatic action were also combined with a call by the FMP for greater understanding and acceptance of smoke generated during other periods of the prescribed

³⁰ It was brought to the PI’s attention that McClatchy Newspapers (parent company of the *Fresno Bee*, *Modesto Bee* and *Sacramento Bee*) now owns the *Merced Sun-Star* and the *Sierra Star* (Oakhurst) newspapers and might consider identifying one reporter responsible for communicating Yosemite fire information throughout the McClatchy Newspaper system if a crisis management person were identified for ease of contact.

³¹ that reduce smoke impacts on human populations within the beyond Park boundaries.

burning season. It is not difficult foreseeing local public officials and community leaders rallying support and intervening as necessary with regional air pollution control district authorities to “*show some flexibility when the FMP is trying to do the right thing*” in exchange for YNP administration’s demonstrated inclusion of local concerns in its FMP activities. Initiation of such a policy would also benefit future Park visitors – domestic and international – desirous of scheduling family vacations and visits at times when Yosemite’s breath-taking beauty can be enjoyed to its fullest³².

It is envisioned that implementation of this recommendation could serve as YNP administration’s initial educational step in building greater public awareness of and support for its Fire Management Program. For example, this initiative could initially be publicized via some existing regional meeting announcement (during a *Gateway Partners* quarterly meeting, for example) or designed as a stand-alone event at which regional stakeholder representatives along with interested community members could devote part of one day discussing the long-term benefits of FMP activities on forest health and public safety vs. short-term costs of smoke impacts on local and regional residents and visitors to the Park. Such a carefully designed and facilitated educational forum³³ could enable the FMP’s “*message*” to better connect with those representatives living beyond Park boundaries, and directly extend that message (through newspaper and other media coverage) to those residing within the Yosemite region represented by study participants.

At first glance, such a recommendation will doubtlessly appear “*counter-intuitive*” to YNP administration and FMP personnel having to bargain hard, annually, with local and regional air pollution control regulators in order to gain approval to burn on as many days as possible. For them, reduction of their “*burning window*” by approximately four weeks during the time when conditions tend to be most favorable for prescribed burning would result in ever greater accumulations of fuels that could become major life-threatening conflagrations. If YNP administration and FMP personnel were to implement such a policy, what would they get in return? In brief: greater public understanding of and support for what the FMP is doing, and greater tolerance for short-term smoke impacts on some so that long-term forest health can be improved, and public safety can be increased for all – residents and visitors alike.

This first step could evolve into a series of regularly occurring dialogues between YNP administrators and FMP personnel with representatives of the various sectors affected by actions taken within the Park. This recommendation could also be implemented through a “*pilot public engagement / partnership project*” that could be assessed by NPS officials for applicability beyond the Yosemite region. In sum: this recommendation warrants serious consideration; its implementation, however, depends upon various factors (such as time commitment, agency priorities, available resources, and willingness to involve the public to a greater extent than before) beyond the scope of this study.

REC 6 Provide Regular Opportunities for Stakeholder Involvement in FMP Activities

The majority of study participants (irrespective of affiliation) would like to become more involved in FMP activities – shifting from somewhat passive participants to contributing partners

³² without visitors’ eyes and lungs being subjected to smoke.

³³ which could be framed as a “*Fire and Smoke Summit*” or “*Fire Education Forum*”

in future endeavors. Although “*partnerships*” were expressed differently³⁴ they all include a fervent desire to work much more closely with FMP personnel in helping its important message reach as well as behaviorally change people’s attitudes and actions about forest health, public safety and greater enjoyment of the National Park System’s crown jewel – Yosemite.

Public education and outreach could take any number of forms. For some, it might include FMP partnering with one or more regional NGOs and utilizing their membership to extend its message. For others, it might include piloting a “train the trainer” volunteer program³⁵ whereby community residents receive and gain some level of certification in FMP-related education from fire professionals before being required to share that information within their localities.³⁶ While many volunteer programs traditionally focus on adults – particularly those who are retired yet wish to stay actively engaged in the life of their communities – they can just as easily be modified for incorporation within the various local and regional elementary school systems.³⁷

Public engagement by FMP personnel might also include day-long hosted interactions with local and regional media held within the Park on a regular basis.³⁸ During those meetings, FMP personnel could engage one-on-one or in small groups with interested media representatives wishing to learn more about certain topics that can then be incorporated as background material in the preparation of feature articles and/or series about what YNP administration and FMP personnel are doing, why they are doing it, and how such actions benefit the listening, reading and viewing public. Perhaps more importantly, however, are the relationships developed between FMP personnel and the media facilitating easier future access and more timely information exchange between parties.

FMP engagement might also include incorporation of Tribal Elders at the beginning of each year’s prescribed burning campaign. Such involvement would provide a wonderful opportunity for cultural exchange and understanding as well as development of interpersonal relationships between the FMP and tribal representatives.

REC 7 FMP Collaboration with Other Stakeholders to Obtain Additional Funding for New and/or Expanded Activities

While several of these recommendations can be implemented relatively quickly and without the need for new funding, others will require additional financial resources for piloting and evaluation. Many study participants place a high value on what the FMP is trying to achieve, and have expressed a strong desire to actively engage with FMP personnel in seeking the necessary resources to realize its important outcomes. During the course of this study, the PI

³⁴ Public education and outreach; media days; involvement of tribal elders at the annual initiation of prescribed burning; volunteer training; classroom training; etc.

³⁵ Cooperative Extension programs within State Land-Grant Universities like Washington State University, Oregon State University and the University of California have successfully utilized this concept in developing training curriculum and implementing volunteer programs such as “*Master Gardeners*,” “*Master Watershed Stewards*”, etc. There is no reason to believe the concept could not be extended to something like a “*Master Fire Educator*” volunteer program were resources made available to develop similar curriculum.

³⁶ For example, speaking before clubs, organizations and schools; holding workshops; organizing fire education walks, etc.

³⁷ as has been vividly demonstrated through FMP employee Taro Pusina’s innovative educational program within YNP schools.

³⁸ once or twice each year.

gained the distinct impression that quite a few participants – were they asked to serve – would participate in a collaborative task group focused on securing the necessary resources for greater FMP effectiveness.

VII. Conclusion

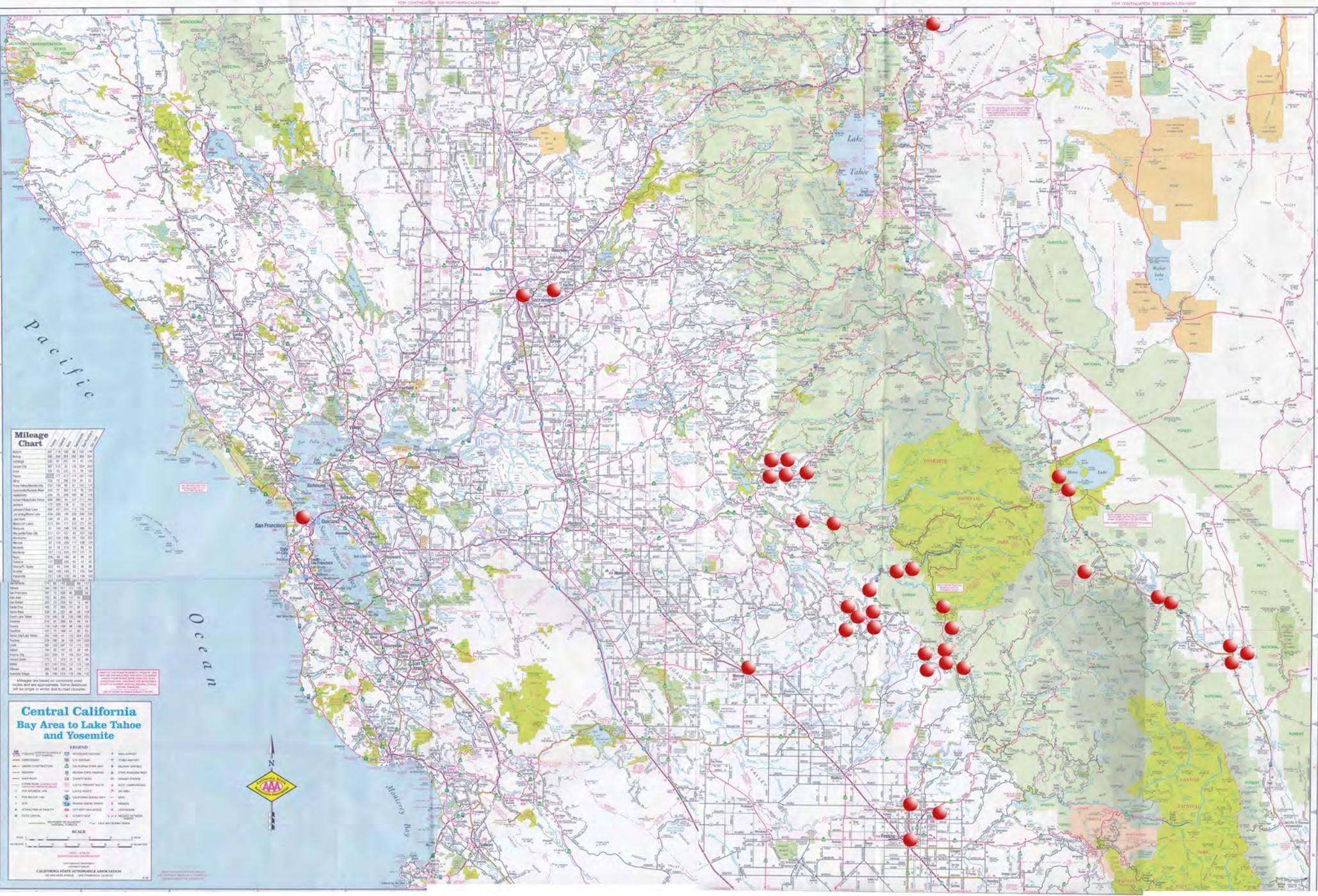
The PI is quite cognizant of the fact that a decision to implement any of the above recommendations rests with National Park Service colleagues. This study has attempted to provide those decision makers with a balanced and focused “*snapshot*” of stakeholder perceptions in order that they might better understand³⁹ the range and depth of sentiment on which the various findings and recommendations are based. Once YNP administration and FMP personnel have had sufficient opportunity to read through and reflect upon this report, it is hoped they will then discuss and determine how and when to engage with those who have so freely and fully contributed their experiences, stories, insights and suggestions for the future betterment of Yosemite’s Fire Management Program.

The PI wishes to express his gratitude to NPS colleagues for having allowed him to engage in this study, and also his appreciation to its many participants for having shared their concerns and suggestions regarding Yosemite’s Fire Management Program. This interactive process has generated important information and goodwill, stimulated further reflections and insights, and demonstrated widespread desire and commitment to partner with the FMP in extending its vital message and mission throughout the Yosemite region. It has been a distinct privilege serving as an informational conduit between people and programs, as well as a personally rewarding experience developing new friendships with incredible individuals encountered through this educational study.

Appendices:

- #1 Participation request letter from Chief of Fire & Aviation Management Kelly Martin.
- #2 Follow-up letter from Principal Investigator.
- #3 Regional map showing locations where the 38 study participants were interviewed.
- #4 Transcript of agency (N=8) interviews.
- #5 Transcript of business / chamber of commerce / tourism (N=6) interviews.
- #6 Transcript of county government (N=6) interviews.
- #7 Transcript of environmental non-governmental organization (N=6) interviews.
- #8 Transcript of media (N=5) interviews.
- #9 Transcript of town planning advisory council / local residents (N=5) interviews.
- #10 Transcript of tribal government (N=2) interviews.
- #11 Copy of the interview instrument.

³⁹ particularly through the transcripts.



Mileage Chart

	100	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	1000
100	100	190	280	370	460	550	640	730	820	910
200	190	280	370	460	550	640	730	820	910	1000
300	280	370	460	550	640	730	820	910	1000	1090
400	370	460	550	640	730	820	910	1000	1090	1180
500	460	550	640	730	820	910	1000	1090	1180	1270
600	550	640	730	820	910	1000	1090	1180	1270	1360
700	640	730	820	910	1000	1090	1180	1270	1360	1450
800	730	820	910	1000	1090	1180	1270	1360	1450	1540
900	820	910	1000	1090	1180	1270	1360	1450	1540	1630
1000	910	1000	1090	1180	1270	1360	1450	1540	1630	1720

Central California Bay Area to Lake Tahoe and Yosemite

LEGEND

SCALE

0 100 200 Miles

0 100 200 Kilometers

CALIFORNIA STATE AUTOMOBILE ASSOCIATION



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NPS Study Responses – Agencies

Q-1 Relationship to Yosemite National Park. I'd like to begin by asking you to describe your "connection" to Yosemite National Park (and the Fire Management Program, if possible)

I've worked here for twenty years. I've been their control officer for six years. I came to work here – I'm a civil engineer – to solve the Owens Lake dust problem. And I worked on that for fourteen years, doing research, and writing documents (environmental documents) and fighting lawsuits from the State and Los Angeles – and getting them to get going.

**

As the program manager for the forest here, I work with Kelly Martin and the annual operating plan and how people share resources for prescribed fire and incidents that are border incidents. We've got a little project where we're trying to work together now to change our protection boundary around Yosemite West. Right now it's in our DPA, and it takes us two and a half hours to get there. And they're right there. So we're talking about moving the boundary to provide better protection to private property in Yosemite West subdivision. That's an easy negotiation – no issues there. I don't think some of their operational folks much care for it, because it's more work for them. But Kelly understands that it makes sense.

And so, those kinds of interactions and...we have an overhead team (interagency fire management team) for this area, called the "province team" which consists of the three forests, the Stanislaus, Sierra and Sequoia, and two parks, Yosemite & Sequoia-Kings Canyon. But this overhead team is interagency. And we've got some Park folks on that. In fact Kelly's division chief is the Deputy I.C. on the team. And I work with them. I've been on that team before with all of them, and they're all pretty bright. So we share that team, and we kind of oversee whatever little financing there is for the team. And we work together on that.

**

I'm responsible for 6 million acres scattered across Nevada, with 800,000 acres of that in California (from the Tahoe Basin on down to Bridgeport).

I have no responsibility for the Yosemite area. I am part of a group called the "Sierra Fire Managers." We meet once or twice a year – often we don't even meet, we just get on a video conference call or something. And we discuss issues that are common to all of us managing fire in the Sierra ecosystem. There hasn't been a lot of big issues lately. And most of the folks that are closer to Yosemite are involved – say the Humboldt Toiyabe that extends down below Bridgeport – both other than that, we're not involved with their smoke monitoring, their cameras, and some of those things. But we sure appreciate them letting us know what they're doing, and we share what we're doing.

**

Since the Stanislaus is adjacent to Yosemite, we work together. We have agreements between the Forest and the Park of utilizing resources primarily to help the Park in burning and/or fires and all those kinds of things. We also have joint – our land adjoins each other, so there are times when we join up...if it's a fire, for example, we have a unified command...and working together to meet both objectives of the Park and the Forest. So, we're pretty much – we know what the Park's doing; they know what we're doing. We have open dialogue (especially with Fire Management because it's fire folks to fire folks). And we do joint training together. We have an engine up at Hodgdon that is half Forest Service and half Park Service. And then we also have individuals from the Forest Service on the helicopter up there at Crane Flat. So, we work together quite a bit.

I've been in this position five years. And I've been thirty-five years on the forest.

**

Professionally, I manage BLM lands in Central California, and so we have BLM lands both on the east and the west of the Park that are managed by two of our offices. We have a bunch of lands up and down the foothills that our managed by our Mother Lode field office. And so that includes Mariposa County parcels – especially along the Merced River. And then on the Eastside, there are lands managed out of our Bishop field office. Those are a little bit farther away from the Park boundary...The Park is surrounded by the National Forest, and then outside of that we get into the BLM Public Lands. We have been trying to participate in the Gateway Partnership meetings with the Park – which is a great way to share information and to meet some of our partners. And I think that's a really excellent thing that the Park does, in terms of sharing information with the communities and with the public. It allows for a little more in-depth discussion of some topics. I would actually think that a fire topic is probably appropriate – at least once a year, with the Gateway Partners meetings. I haven't been to a lot of those, but I assume they've probably talked about fire and fuels management, and things like that. I was just amazed at the support that the Superintendent and his staff give to those meetings. A lot of NPS folks show up, and they give really excellent presentations, and answer really good questions. And so I think it's a good way to share in-depth information.

**

Professionally speaking, what we do for the Park is, we usually engage in fire suppression activities – usually it's an uncontrolled situation (uncontrolled wildfire) – and over the years – and I've been here since 1988 – we've had several opportunities to work together. And so from that perspective, it's a professional (usually suppression-based) activity where we're working together.

I will tell you that in 2008 on the Telegraph Fire, when we concerned that we were going to lose a section of Highway 140 and it was going to move into the Park – and move into

an area where we really can't get a foothold on the fire – we had a real close working relationship with Chief Shackelton and his staff, and so we had the opportunity to get to know each other a lot better, and talk about some of the things that you're dealing with here.

**

Our relationship with Yosemite NP is very positive in the fire programs. We work closely on communications, share staff/engine. I know over the last few years we both have assisted each other on our fires. And that's a great feeling to have, to tell you the truth. I know I can count on them to respond if needed.

**

We're an interagency fire organization here. I'm the Fire Management Officer for both the Bishop field office of the BLM and for the Inyo National Forest [US Forest Service]. From Topaz Lake to Little Lake – the eastern escarpment here is my responsibility. And we have a mutual boundary with Yosemite on the north half of the forest. And for that, we do have some dated agreements (MOUs) in place that kind of cover our mutual responses – particularly along the Highway 120 corridor.

As I noted above we have little formal (or informal) contact with the fire managers in the park and we probably don't need to, aside from smoke issues there is little chance that a fire in the park would affect us.

Early in my career I was on a Type 1 national management team (for fifteen years), and we were on fires in the Yellowstone wilderness. And I've always said since then that young fire fighters – the best part of their education is to fly over that landscape and see the effects that fire has on it. And how beautiful it is. It's a great education.

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Q-2 Sources of Information for Fire Management Activities and Events. What are your preferred sources of information for learning about Fire Management Program activities and events? Why are these sources preferred?

Being included in their mailing list, emails, and if they've got a project proposal that's coming up. I might read about that. I don't necessarily want to be a member of their scoping team for the NEPA end of it! They've got their own way of doing that.

If a project comes up – and it doesn't happen very often – Kelly will give me a phone call and we chat about it.

**

The email alerts are the best. I'm on a mail list. I can't even remember the person's name who sends it out. Schweizer. I appreciate their fire manager's email alerts to let me know what's going on. That way I get the information whether I'm in the local area or not. That for me, personally, is the best form of communication. I don't go to their websites because I'm not...suffering the smoke or curious in that manner. Just as a fire manager, I like being updated about what they're doing, so that if I get questioned "where's the smoke coming from?" or "what's going on over there in Yosemite?" I have up to date information.

I think you have to take a combination of approaches. We change as a society – so you still have that older generation that watches the news, and read the newspaper. But you have Generation X and Generation Y and they're on facebook and twitter and things that are probably already out there, but you and I aren't aware of. So, even if you're just redirecting them to whatever outlets you do have. It's important to use what society is using; if society is on facebook and twitter we need to get on there. We tend to continue to talk to ourselves, and people of our own age bracket. We really need to tell the rest of producing society what we're doing – the twenties and thirties crowd.

I'll talk as the Forest Fire Management Officer on the Stanislaus. I'll talk from my position. One of the things that – I guess I'll use "expectations" – the expectation is that if they (the fire management group) have something going, to give me a call so we can talk one-on-one about what is going on, where it is, and what their intentions are, and the objectives, and if they need help. But more of that one-on-one dialogue is what I see high value in...We're generally a phone call away.

The thing about that what I like – the Park is doing that. They have a few fires that they're managing (more for resource benefit than the Slope Fire caused by lightning that you're probably aware of that is going on right now). With those fires, their public information officer will give me periodic (almost daily) updates of what's going on. That's about right, and that is helpful. We can articulate what...if we see smoke in the air, it's not like a response – we can realize that that smoke is coming from, for example, the Slope Fire, and "no, we don't have a fire in the Park." We can offset some of the concerns on the Park by having that knowledge, because we get a lot of those phone calls as well as probably the Park does. So, we can give people that information and let them know.

Emails for sure. Information provided by Deb is certainly the best.

Subsequent addition: After I spoke with you I met with our burn program guy. He said Yosemite (Leland Tarnay) is very good about getting the technical information out to the air pollution control people. I guess my point is that there does not seem to be enough

communication with the public in the form of press releases, burn articles and personal visits.

There's very little formal contact with Yosemite. Everything that I'm getting is informal through the media, and informal through the various websites that are available to us. Sometimes I look at them, and sometimes I don't. – it depends on how busy I am on any given day.

Local media. We've done a lot of work over here through out prescribed fire program and through our fire for resource benefit program, to educate the public about the role natural fire and prescribed fire have in the landscape. And so they all know what we're doing when there's smoke in the air. They don't always like it! So when the park sends us smoke (yes, I'm fully aware everyone on the west side writes their burn plans to send the smoke East) it would be good if they coordinated with our local media.

We have our own program with Cal Fire, okay? And it's been somewhat diminished over the years due to some of the environmental and social issues that are in front us. My relationship with the Park typically is providing them resources to assist with their prescribed fire management program – which I think is an excellent program – and I have my opinions about programs and issues that...I understand some people get upset about. But if you don't have a prescribed fire concept in place, you put yourself in a position where if you don't take care of it, Mother Nature will. And once she does, it ends up being – first of all, you can't manage the smoke; okay? You have more ability to manage the smoke when you put fire on the ground yourself. Secondly, if it's an uncontrolled wildfire, you can't manage smoke nor can you manage the direction and travel of fire which really has devastating impacts on the community as you well know.

And, the Park has always had excellent prescribed fire management programming. And I think that they probably had some handcuffs put on them over the years. And it's a shame, because I think they need to do more burning, not less.

Personal contact, emails, websites. We have a great support in some of the Park staff for information on fire management activities – Gary Wuchner has done an outstanding job of coordination and assistance on fires.

I would like to have more meetings – semi-annually – before and after the fire season with fire staff and Park Superintendent.

I think as the visiting public, I would probably go to the Park website. That would be the first place that I would look for information about where there were ongoing fires; if there were smoke impacts that could affect my vacation plans in the Park. From a professional standpoint, if there's a wildfire that's being suppressed, then I would expect information about that to show up in the normal places where those fires are noted – whether it's in the national situation report, or Inciweb, or some of the other websites where there generally is information about fire activity. The fires that are being managed – we keep changing our terminology, but the ones that aren't being actively suppressed and are being allowed to burn, to play a more natural role – I think communicating about fires tends to be a real challenge, because for even someone like me who deals with those every day, I still don't know what the right terminology is, because we keep changing it. And I think this is maybe a little hard for the public to understand – that “yes, there's a fire going on” but “no, it's not really an emergency, and in fact it's probably a good thing, and we're letting nature takes its course because it's a safe place for that to happen.”

And so I think websites are probably most important, but I have also been in the Park when there's been fires burning and there's been signs like up at Glacier Point or in the Valley explaining to people what's going on – that they needn't worry about it. They needn't report it to a Ranger, and those kinds of things. So I think that's a really good way of reaching people, too.

You know, I really admire the Park's burning program, and I think that all of the public land management agencies benefit from their aggressive fuels reduction program; and that it's happening in Yosemite Valley, in plain sight of all the visitors. They're not trying to make it look beautiful all the time, but they're showing that there are some really important things that need to go on. And I think that's a real benefit, too – to BLM, the Forest Service – to all the public land management agencies. Because Yosemite has a bigger audience – and maybe an audience that pays a little more attention and is more willing to learn about nature while they're there in Yosemite. And I think it's a great opportunity to explain to people about the important role of fire in the ecosystem – and especially when you've got pictures of how open the Valley used to be back when the Indians were burning it periodically as compared to now, when we've been so successful at suppressing fires for so long. And it's really gotten to be much more of a closed-in environment. And so I really appreciate the work the Park is doing, and I encourage them to keep being active in both the fuels management and in letting fire play as much of a natural role as it can.

Q-3 Your Understanding of Fire Management's Decision-Making Process. Could you please briefly describe your understanding of how Fire Management decisions are arrived at within Yosemite National Park?

I don't have a working knowledge of that. Basically, I know that they have a program; I know that that program is driven by leadership; and I know that they have well trained

people. And so as far as...For me, I'm comfortable with that, because I see it working. But I don't have a real in-depth working knowledge of it.

**

I don't know exactly how they do it, but I would assume they follow the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for a prescribed burn. As far as when they get a lightning strike and they decide how much active suppression activity they have to take, I think they use some of the same checklists that we do, and probably go through a program to help them evaluate the different alternatives on a much more compressed time scale.

We don't do a lot of prescribed burning on the BLM parcels, because they tend to be right in the urban interface – smaller parcels surrounded by private lands. We don't really have that luxury a whole lot. But I would assume that we're sharing information, and sharing air quality concerns where we would have to do some coordination.

**

To my knowledge those decisions are made in the park very similar to the way they are made outside the park; they have a Land Management Plan that has a Fire Management Plan component to it, based on those documents when an ignition occurs the appropriate response is then generated and action taken; the action could range from full suppression to monitor depending on location and values at risk. A lot of this is of course overseen by a line officer / Ranger in charge.

My knowledge of the fire program in Yosemite is actually pretty limited. It seems like I have very little contact with them. Certainly when something is going on over there – whether it's a prescribed fire or a natural (wild) fire type of situation, we hear about it. But really, for any formal communication or contact between the eastside here and Yosemite: very little at my level (at the fire management level). I don't know if more contact is necessary. We get the information we get from the media or through the various situation reports that are available to us, so we know what's going on. There are agreements in place that cover us on the northern end of the forest or mutual aid type of responses, and things like that.

I believe my philosophy is very inline with the Park Service. They're trying to maintain a natural type of environment over there (ecosystem), and I like that approach. I think that's a great tool to have in the toolbox, and we employ the same tool over here as often as we can. So I'm a huge supporter of what they do, and I hope that's mutual.

**

I believe it is similar to FS process, with maybe a few more layers. In fact, all the federal land managers subscribe to similar processes.

So I would hope that we would get a clearer understanding.

**

I thought I had an idea, based on our paradigm or our method of doing things, but last year when they lost that control burn, I heard that part of their process of making decisions is cumbersome in my mind. And I think it became apparent in their minds as well, because they couldn't make a decision when the fire finally had escaped their containment they wanted to use dozers, but it took so long for them to get the right person to make the decision to use dozers that it was beyond the dozers after that.

There's a lot of, you know, "we're specialists." And I see it in our agency as well. And specialists have a lot of power – not power, but have a lot of decision-making or advice giving authority that they sometimes turn into decision-making when it comes to disturbing the land or altering the landscape. And I see that – that's probably more (in my mind) more of an issue in the Park, where all the –oligists and specialists have a lot of decision-making power or sway.

**

Hmm...I don't know totally how it works, other than I was on – I was an Incident Commander for a team, and we went through the Big Meadows Fire last year. So I had to learn a little bit about how the organization works at the Park – which is different than the Forest Service. I didn't realize that there was those differences, and the decision making processes, and all that.

When we did "lessons learned" from that fire, one of the things we did do, for example, is that if there was a team to ever come into the Park again, to take "Organization 101A real quick, to understand that there – for example: in the Forest Service, there is the FMO works straight with the Forest Supervisor. In the case of the Park, they work for Resources (I think it's called; I'm not sure). The FMO works for like Steve Shackelton, who works with the Park Superintendent.

The way I understand it, there's the fire fighting and structure group (there's a portion of that). And then there's also the fuels management portion of it. So there's like two sides of the house there that do business. And so you need...for myself, coming from an Incident Commander standpoint, I needed to understand those kinds of things (how their echelon works) to see who to connect with, and all that.

**

I don't know that it's a different process. We all look at our land management plan and write an appropriate fire management plan that dovetails into that land management plan. And then depending on our funding, we implement what we can. And once again, I mentioned it earlier: they have an ecosystem that's supportive of fire use – I guess that's

a defunct phrase! -- they have a program that allows them to use fire to manage for a resource benefit, and with a lower risk than some others.

Their process seems fine to me. It's an interagency burn plan. It's the same way we do. I think they have a lot more opportunity. And I think their program is tailored to their opportunity, too; whereas our responsibility is more of a "community protection" – and there are some ecosystem components on our program, don't get me wrong! But...they've really tailored their program to opportunities and their needs.

**

I'm more aware of the decision process that Inyo National Forest – because, again, neither of the parks are actually in our district. So, they wouldn't have to file a plan with us (they're in the San Joaquin district). But, Inyo National Forest, BLM – we've also got Humboldt, Toiyabe...I don't know if Yosemite needs to file a plan (with us). San Joaquin (air pollution control district) does a great job with the plan, and we've learned a lot from them. They do a great job of developing a plan, and then enforcing the plan. It's just that communication, I think, regarding what Yosemite is up to [that] would be helpful [to know]. If notification would occur after the plan has been filed, then maybe my fire guy could go talk with San Joaquin's fire guy with questions, and for coordination and keeping up to date on what they're actually intending.

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Q-4 Impact of Media Releases. If you heard about a smoke event through the media (for example, via media release): what information would influence your decision to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away? Please elaborate.

From a fire management standpoint, if they had smoke issues, I would want to know about it. And what kind of calls they're getting. And really, to help support them in the sense of what is their issue, and try to keep apprised of what it is. And, to also let people that are calling in to our UCC – if the Park wants us to direct those questions to a certain individual, or they want us to help answer those questions and give us talking points I think would be the most efficient and effective way of doing that kind of business. Because a lot of the people get a lot of different ideas of what it is. So it is good practice. And I think the Park is pretty sharp at developing talking points, developing "here's what we're doing...here's what we're trying to do...this is how it's going" and all those kinds of things. And as long as that's on the same page, when we get linked up to that information I think would be very well received by the public.

I think we're pretty well linked up. If I have any questions it's just a phone call away. And those folks know me, and I know them very well, and enough to where we can get those questions answered.

**

If we're involved in the media release, or have it sent to us (for example, Deb sent one over to us last week, and I saw that release), it appears in the media a couple of days later. So, we don't rely on the media because we usually know before the public does. What's done by Deb in Sequoia-Kings is a good model: she'll say "we're going to be burning in two areas; one is 34 acres and one is 15 acres. We expect them to burn for a week. And we anticipate that in the afternoons the smoke will be heading towards populated areas..." And the media will pick that up and puts in a little blurb, and everybody knows about it. And I don't get telephone calls. Because when that doesn't happen – and a lot of times too, especially with the kind of burn that Yosemite does, it will burn somewhere in the park – it might not hit our way until afternoon, because of the way the weather is. It burns up there – you get a big chunk of smoke – and then it starts drifting over...and it drifts through all the canyons. And you can't tell where it's coming from. You don't know whether it's in our high country in our national forest here, or whether it's in the park. You don't know whether it's a wild fire that's just starting up, or a prescribed burn. So, having those press releases ahead of time – people will know. They'll read it, and then a day or so later they'll see it, and then they'll say "oh yeah, that's the fire that was in the update."

**

I don't know that smoke would influence my decision, personally, because I've lived with it my whole life – and I'm not sure that smoke is limiting the majority of people that are visiting. People schedule their vacations, and they pretty much head out. I'm sure that major events limit travel – but my experience going through Yosemite is that if they didn't close the roads when fire was impinging those roads, Yosemite would operate at capacity pretty much all the time, anyway.

I'm not living or working in Yosemite. That's my outside impression. Every time that I've been there it's been crowded unless they kick you out. So, there may be some media impact to visitors' use of Yosemite, and possibly the surrounding areas. But I don't know that it's limited to heavier impacts where some folks worry. I'm sure business folks would tell you that it's a huge impact. And I don't know that it is.

**

Well I try not to go up there period because there's too many people! I do love traveling through it in the Fall and in the Spring. Smoke doesn't sway me. I don't mind smoke. I love the smell of forest smoke.

As far as an event that we've had: usually when the Park has an event – of smoke – we have fires too, and it takes the heat off of us. The Park fires are usually bigger as they're managed. If we've got fires going on at the same time – it's kind of like 2008 when it wasn't quite so bad because the Park didn't have all that many. They had a few – but we had some right on the outside, and they were putting up a lot of smoke. And they've got the Mountain counties air district (Mariposa, Tuolumne and up that way), and we've got the San Joaquin Valley air district. And the mountain counties have always been a little

more “liberal” in their acceptance of smoke, as opposed to the San Joaquin. And so we’re under tighter – and in my opinion – higher scrutiny than they are. But we’ve got a Park on the south side of us, too (Kings Canyon), and they’re in the San Joaquin, and they just get hammered all the time by the APCD. And in fact they’re getting it again right now, as they have a managed fire that’s putting up quite a bit of smoke.

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I’m probably not your typical visitor to the Park. But I guess if I saw a press release about smoke or about a fire, it might affect me, depending on where it was located. It certainly wouldn’t deter me from visiting the Park at all. Because I know it’s large enough that you could avoid the smoke if you wanted to. It also might tempt me to go see where the burning’s going on – if we can get close enough to see what was happening, and how the fuels were being consumed, and what the end result was after they had done the burning (because I’m interested in that kind of management application). And I know there are other kinds of fuels reduction work that they do, too, where they’re thinning (cutting trees down), piling and removing the material – which is all part of the fuels management work that they do.

So yes, I think press releases are good. I think the more information you provide people, the better. Because I think it can be kind of a shock for somebody if they showed up and they wanted to go to a specific place in the Park, and it was either closed or there was enough smoke that they couldn’t see what they wanted to see.

I think it’s really critical that when the Park does press releases and talks about fires, that they’re really clear on what the visitor impact of that would be (in addition to what the natural values of the fire are). If you tell people where they can go and not see the fire, and not smell smoke if they don’t want to, then that seems to me the best thing they could do helping the community feel better about not cutting into tourism.

I would think the press release -- if it’s a prescribed fire, or one that they’re using for management benefit – that it would talk about where the fire is, if there are places where you can see the fire from, to see the smoke from – but plus really stress the benefits of why they’re doing the burning, and maybe in the future the public’s likely to see the benefits of that fire. But then also, maybe just at the bottom provide a paragraph about where you could go if smoke bothers you or if you don’t want to be around the fire. It’s such a big area that you can surely find a place to go that meets your needs while you’re in there. And maybe that’s an opportunity to disperse people to some of the lesser visited parts of the Park, as well.

**

The Groveland Ranger District serves a large population that goes into the Park. My staff works closely with the entrance staff for information – trying to assist the public with updated information before they get to the Park. I think we are doing a better job with coordination – we still need support from the valley information centers to feed us

as well so that this can be improved for continuity of consistent information to our visitors.

Now as someone who lives in the area now (taking the badge off), basically through the media release – through a number of telephone numbers that you can call – and more importantly around here, we have people that visit the Park for fishing all the time (in and out all the time). That’s really our source of information: word of mouth with the public that lives in this environment.

So that’s usually how – if Mary and I choose to take a trip for the weekend into the Park or something like that, and we know there’s some prescribed fire going on, it doesn’t change our opinion or attitude at all with regard to traveling.

Q-5 Fire and Smoke Management Assessment. When you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?

For the most part: well organized. They know what they’re doing. I have – in spite of Big Meadow (and we can all learn from Big Meadow) – I think they’re an efficient, effective operation. I trust that they know what they’re doing. Burning there is a risk. I can’t deny that. And the community doesn’t want to have any risk. Yet there’s risk involved.

And I hope by now they know that we’ve demonstrated on this side when we’ve done our prescribed burns that we’re an effective, efficient operation. We know what we’re doing. And yes, we can always learn.

That said, I think the perception of the Highway 120 communities has been that the Park will do what they want, when they want. Hopefully, with the new guidelines that perception is changing.

I have worked on the Groveland Ranger District since 2008 as the District Ranger and during those years we both have conducted prescribe burning. We also have had wildfires that have occurred on both Forest and Park lands. We share issues regarding smoke management – although I understand that because it is a Class 1 Airshed we are sensitive about the level of smoke and there are times that when the Park has approval – we may not due to the amount of smoke that may occur.

My experience over the last few years is that I did not hear of issues from our prescribe burning in the surrounding communities until last year with the Big Meadow Fire. The issues were more about Highway 120 closing due to the fire than it was about smoke.

**

Not enough! Not enough. There needs to be more. I think if they were allowed to do more of that type of management, it would make my life and the life of many of the Cal Fire employees easier, because they're eliminating exactly what needs to be eliminated in a controlled environment.

**

Well, the main thing that comes to my mind is admiration. I was there...a year or two ago, and they had burned part of the Valley. And I was just awe-struck, because it takes a lot of "guts" to do that, and to create something that a lot of the visitors would perceive as being fairly ugly until it's had time to recover. But on the other hand, it needed it. And what a great place to talk about management tools, including lighting fires, and using Mother Nature fire starts where it's appropriate. So I just think they're doing an excellent job with that.

As far as smoke management, I've been in the Park a lot of times when there have been fires burning, and most of the time you don't even notice that they're there. They're way in the back country, and you wouldn't even know they were burning unless you saw a sign up somewhere saying "there's a fire up this trail" or "you may see this from Glacier Point" or something. In any given summer, they probably have something burning in the back country. But I don't think it's very impactful. Every now and then they get those big wildfires in the front country in the Wawona area, and those obviously have a big impact on the public and the surrounding communities. And those are difficult to deal with wherever they occur.

**

Not too much. I know that they're suppressing fires where they have to suppress fires in the WUI areas, and they're letting fires burn where it's appropriate to let them burn. I know their prescribed fire program is very similar to anybody else's. They're treating the areas that -- both in WUI areas that are going to affect population centers or improvements, and that they're also burning in the non-WUI areas and general forest areas where it needs to be done. I support the plan.

I mean I understand their fire program, and what they're doing in the Park. I have some of the same philosophies myself about prescribed natural fire, and fire for resource benefit, and those sorts of things. And we employ those tactics where we can on this forest. So, we're pretty much in synch on that at that level.

**

I think that they do a good job in managing fires and smoke management. I think the Big Meadows Fire -- which was one that was lost -- and I think that they learned from that. And I think that they've got a good program. And I think that a lot of that is coordinated,

and I think they have a lot of...they do a lot of prescribed burning. They do a lot of resource management fires and all that. They are very tuned in to the Park. That's what I learned. All the Park people have a...they have certain jobs and all that. I didn't realize at that time (even being a neighbor for thirty some odd years) that there is a thousand people in the Park – which has its own jurisdiction...It's like an inner city within an inner world. And a lot of those people take that to heart. And all those people – not just in fire, but the resources, resource people – all those people take the concerns of the public...and all that is well represented within those functions within that Park. Which I tip my hat to. I mean they do a very good job of that.

You know – the communication. Those guys all know – whether it's the National Parks or the BLM, or the Forest Service – they all know what they're doing. And, the necessary consequence of what they're doing is smoke. And they know, working with us on this side, or working with San Joaquin on the other side, they know how to do this. And so, as I said, smoke is a necessary and unfortunate consequence of their job. And we know they can't eliminate that smoke. But we can improve public communication and outreach..

Maybe the burn conditions are great, but at some point acknowledge the fact that we've been breathing your smoke ALL SUMMER LONG, and we're tired of it. This message is not getting through. It's communication! There was an incident a couple of years ago where even the employees in Yosemite Valley rose up in rebellion. Did you hear about that? It was awful. And so by the time it gets to that, they KNOW there's a problem. It's just that at some point they need to say, "Look we're going to put this out right now. We would prefer not to put it out, but everybody has put up with smoke long enough."

And so I guess it's maybe a...rebalancing of the need to do their burn program versus our need to breathe clean air. At some point, it shifts. "We've put up with enough of that smoke. Stop the burn program this year." It might be a great condition, and you might get another whole month in, but we've had it. Just stop. Acknowledge the fact that people are rebelling...because I don't think they realize – they don't want anybody to tell them what to do.

Again, there needs to be acknowledgment from the people on the Westside that there are those of us on the eastside, and do some outreach here.

I am very pleased with the way Sequoia-Kings communicates with us. The Sequoia-Kings people send me an email every single day during the burn season. And not only do they send an email with an update, they also include press releases so that we can go ahead and – I think they turn it over to the media, but if we get any questions from the media, we'll refer it to Deb Schweizer. Whatever she does, Yosemite needs to do.

Yosemite communicates on a technical basis, but the information is generally not meant for the public.

And poor Lee Vining. I remember maybe two years ago Yosemite had one that just went for the longest time. And EVERY afternoon those canyons were so full of smoke, and it was just – like the hot and calm weather we’re having now when the high pressure sets in, it just wafts down into Lee Vining and the Mono basin.

**

I’ve always been impressed with Yosemite’s program. I guess it’s the jewel of the Park Service (to some people, anyway), and the amount of tourists they have and people they have in there – I’ve gone through there when they’ve been managing fires, and they do a great job of information and education. There’s billboards in turn-outs; there’s interpreters at turn-outs when there’s pretty good smoke that can be viewed from an area. And I think it’s great! And to take that risk – you know, they can smoke out the San Joaquin and the most photographed area of the world, practically. And people pay a lot of money to come here and visit it. It makes some angry folks. And to take that risk, and be willing to stick with it, and continue with the program is the right thing to do. There has always been smoke in that valley. I’m just impressed with their ability to do that.

**

I’m not just exactly sure where you’re headed with your study – with your interview or anything – I can provide some perspective. It sounds like you’re zeroed in on smoke, as much as the rest of the program...

I like that they’re out there trying to put fire in the landscape – protect their resources with fire, rather than protect them from fire (because I’m not sure that the latter is the best way to do it). I like that they look at their fires, and limit the impact of the suppression of folks on those fires. I have been a commander in the area. And they’re very concerned about the impact of suppression, as well as the impact of fire, on the landscape. I have found them to be competent, understanding fire managers.

Let’s talk a little bit about their program and process. I think they have a (but I’m not positive of this) that they have more of a fire management modules rather than all suppression modules – or at least a decent mix of those kinds of resources. So it complements the Forest Service resources, which are a little bit more suppression-oriented. We can borrow from them when we have a management need, and they can borrow from us when they have a suppression need. I think that they have a very competent program.

**

Q-6 Likes and Dislikes of the Effects of the Fire Management Program. Keeping this idea in the foreground for a moment: what elements do you like or not like about fire and smoke management at the park?

The one thing that most Westside (of the Sierra) land management agencies aren't aware of is that everything they do, because of the weather and prevailing winds, comes to us. So, probably a little more coordination on prescribed burns and things like that. And certainly they need to be more aware when they're having large fires for resource benefit – that there is a large population over here that that does affect; it does affect tourism over here also. And they need to jump on that media bandwagon on this side of the hill, too. Because invariably, we (our dispatch center) will take all those calls. And it does impact us, to a degree. That is not being covered by them very well over here.

Mostly, I like what I've been seeing there. I think that overall, they're doing a great job, and like I said before, I think they're really benefiting all of the public land management agencies, because they really do have an opportunity to tell the story, and to have people listen and look and learn about the role of fire in the environment. Because we've done such a good job with Smokey the Bear of convincing people that wildfires are bad, we're having a hard time convincing them the other way – that fire can be really good and it does have a really valuable natural role in the environment, especially in the Sierras, where most of the ecosystem evolved with wildfires started by lightning. And we should be allowing that to continue as much as possible.

I just think the program over there in both the national parks – I think we're focused on Yosemite today – is such a great program, because...I mean, they still have to be careful with weather...and certainly smoke's an issues. But they have a great place to use fire and keep some part of their forest ecosystem somewhat intact; whereas, many of us don't have that due to risk. On the east side here, with downhill winds, push fires down into communities – and not just the smoke down into the communities. So we don't have as much “opening” to burn as the other side. So, I'm supportive of what they're doing – even with the smoke they push over to us. I know there's some public concern. But I think some of that is...I don't know how you want to record this, but some folks are just nervous about that. Some folks are just never happy. And so I think we're pleasing the majority of the people the majority of the time. I think it's a great program!

They seem to cut more timber than we are. You know, the Park Service can sell their trees as excess government property, and we can't. And so they get around some environmental issues that way – at least that's what I've understood. It always disturbs me when I see a logging truck leaving the Park. That's our job! And we can't seem to get a tree on the truck anymore...

Due to the controversy from the [Big Meadows] prescribe burn escaping, two town hall meetings occurred in Groveland. The fire management team and the Superintendent faced some very angry residents largely upset about the loss of revenue due to Highway 120 closing. I think the Superintendent acknowledged some error in the course of action and apologized for it – I believe he articulated this well. He also indicated that he was not going to shy away from prescribed burning in the future. And I applaud them for going through the investigation that was seamless and transparent to all of us – everyone had access to the findings.

I believe the Forest and Park work very closely and cooperatively within the fire organization. Currently the windows to burn are getting smaller for each of us (outside of high elevation) and we both share in the struggle to accomplish our burns. Our burning has been occurring in late fall / early winter and early spring. And why I share that with you is because when we do our prescribed burns (for the most part) they may not be burning, and vice versa. We try to work cooperatively in terms of timing. That said we too can't afford to miss the windows. But how to do it and not smoke out the visitors and especially the communities is the real test.

One of the impacts that the downhill smoke management (if you will) has on the community, is that you get several complaints from people when they do their prescribed fire program...occasionally for me, you'll hear people complain about the fact that there's a lot of smoke around here. And I know for some individuals with asthma...they just leave the area. They'll go away for a few days. (Some of them are retired, or about to retire). They have the complaints. And it may be based on being a senior.

The other thing for me is, the one negative impact – and I don't dwell on this too much because our own prescribed fire program is basically in a shambles if you will – is if we have a burn that we would like to accomplish, and they are burning, it is rare that through the Air Quality Control people that we're able to pull our project off. So occasionally there is a negative there, okay? And I've dealt with at – we burned 2,500 acres over on the Coulterville side, and the Park was doing some prescribed fire management. And because of the amount of smoke, and because of the drifting of the smoke, we weren't able to do our project until much later in the year.

So occasionally there's been a negative component, but for the most part I see it as nothing but positive to me.

I think the perspective – and you know I speak for both myself as air pollution control officer and for the public that I hear from – is that when there's smoke in the air, the people call ME; they don't call the Forest Service or the BLM or the Park Service. They call the Air Pollution Control District.

Our perception over here is that...on the Westside, when their smoke is going east, they think they're doing their job. Out of sight, out of mind. And you know they are just THRILLED when the smoke moves to the east – and they forget that, although there are not a lot of us over here, but there are some of us over here. Great Basin is a three county district – it includes Alpine, Mono and Inyo counties. It's enormous. From almost all the way out to Las Vegas, up almost to Tahoe.

We get smoke from both Sequoia-Kings and Yosemite. It's sort of the same concept; and to be perfectly honest, we understand that the air pollution over THERE is a lot worse than the air pollution over here, normally. And so, they really don't want to be adding to it over there. We understand that, but we're not very happy about that. Because, the smoke's got to go somewhere. And they prefer the smoke go this way...and that's just the way it goes. But, Yosemite needs to do that public outreach.

As Air Pollution Control Officer, we understand that the land managers need to do the prescribed burning – but dealing with the smoke isn't really their job. Burning the forest is their job. But smoke is an important part of it. And I think with some of them, the smoke is less important than for others. Deb Schweizer KNOWS that the smoke is important to a lot of other people. Burning in the park is important to them, but really, the only impact of their activities that's felt outside the park – is the smoke. What we've gotten from Yosemite in the past – is “we're the Federal Government, and you can't tell us what to do.” That's the kind of the impression we have. That used to be sort of the case at Sequoia-Kings, but it seems in the last couple of years it's changed pretty dramatically. And so consequently, Deb sends those notices out – and I don't know what her distribution is, but it's pretty wide, because number one: I haven't been getting ANY calls; and just this week in the newspaper, there's a little blurb. They obviously took something from her press release and said, “people in south county, southern Inyo County, you may see smoke over the next few days. Sequoia-Kings is doing a burn. Expect some smoke in the afternoon.” So then, people know where it's coming from and who is causing it.

I cornered Deb one time at a meeting. And I said, “Deb, we need to talk.” This was maybe three or four years ago. I said “you just can't forget about us over there!” And she said, “you know, you're right. I PROMISE that I will include you in the future.” And then when there were things going on over there, we knew about it because there's outreach. And Yosemite's outreach is probably towards the west, and they work with their own local outreach in their air pollution control district. We're NOT in their air pollution control district. And so there's just not that – they act as though there's a big divide up at the top of the crest there.

I think that...we all learn from those different circumstances. And I think that they learned. I think that they are very receptive to learning. The Park itself is very receptive to learning, and changing, and modifying as they grow. For myself, I think they do a good job of that.

I've worked with the Park on many burns...and we do have some cultural differences, but at the same time they adapt as well as have adapted to make some of these things work out. And it's done very well.

**

Q-7 Fire's Impact on the Ecosystem. Could you briefly share your understanding of fire's role in the ecosystem in Yosemite NP? How do you feel fire influences the health of the forest within YNP and the surrounding area?

For the most part, positively. It's different in each part of the ecosystem; certainly not all stand replacement fire is healthy, but some of that is healthy. And much of what they get leaves a mosaic, because they have been practicing. On the particular fire that I was on over there was reburning through an area that had already burned within recent history. This was a couple of years ago. Generally, if we get fire on the landscape in those regimes that need it more repetitively, the better off that you are. And so, I think most of the fire in Yosemite is playing a positive role. I think there are concerns around the Big Trees stands, and I think they've done a pretty good job of that – managing in those stands to try to limit the damage in those stands. And again, that might be a big public-human concern, because we're attached to those Big Trees as much as anything. (Even those stands can stand a little bit of replacement). So, I think that their program is a healthy program – one of the healthiest in the country.

**

Fire, without question, is an integral part of the environment – especially the western environment here. I think we need to do – and the Park is doing it for us – but in the forest as well, we're trying to sell the idea that fire is a natural part of the ecosystem, and we need to manage it as best we can. Granted there are some areas – where we interface – where we've got to go in there under full suppression mode. But we're coming along. Especially in the Sierra [National Forest]. We're a little bit more capable of – and they keep telling us not to use certain words! – we're not supposed to use “fire use” or “for resource benefit.” So we are now managing fires consistent with our land management plan and in the best interest of the environment that the fire's occurring in.

**

Again, I mentioned this before. But I think that fire is extremely important – especially in the Sierras and the lower elevations where we have such a huge level of fuels that we've created over the years, and it's really problematic because the communities and houses tend to back right up to public lands. How do we manage those public lands to reduce the threat of wildfire to the communities, and also to protect the wildlands around the communities from the threat of fire? A lot of times we end up having to do really expensive manual techniques – cutting things out by hand, chipping – and unfortunately,

there's not much market for that material so it's hard to get anybody to come take it out and pay us, or even offset the costs of doing that.

We need more biomass plants. But the problem is it's so labor intensive to cut that material down and then transport it to someplace where it can be turned into energy that it's been very difficult to get people to buy it. So we usually end up having to come up with money to pay them to take the stuff away; which is still better than piling and burning it on site.

The BLM is actually doing a lot of work with the Miwok program as well in Calaveras County, where we're developing small projects and providing funding for crews to do work on the public BLM lands as well as the forest lands.

And so, yes, I think the role of fire is just HUGE. And if we don't do prescribed burning, we're going to be just more susceptible to more intensive wildfires, which then really devastate the environment and take hundreds of years for it to recover from.

I was in a meeting yesterday where we were talking about the new directions the Forest Service is going...and the comment – I'm trying to remember the comment. It was something about "we're going back to correct the past hundred years of mismanagement." It's a new management philosophy to correct the last hundred years of management. And that's really true in fire a lot of times. Our best management practices have not been tried and true, but they are now. And now we're going back and we're letting things burn, and we're doing prescribed fires, and we're trying to maintain that ecosystem / ecological approach. Which is hard to do in a lot of cases, because of that hundred years of suppressing fire. So, I get it.

Yosemite's probably ahead of the game. They've been having fire use fires, and fires in the wilderness, for a lot longer, as a Park agency than Forest has. So I applaud them for that. There is no doubt that fire applied or allowed to burn contributes to a much healthier, resilient and diverse landscape.

It's a necessary tool. It's got to be one of the tools for us. And more than ever it's a necessary tool. I believe we need to keep communicating that message. We need more education on this for the local communities / residents, etc.

Q-8 Health Impacts of Fire Management on Personal Life. During the recent past (say, within the past 12-18 months) have you been personally impacted (e.g., experienced discomfort or respiratory ailment, such as asthma) from smoke generated by naturally

occurring and/or prescribed burning fires within Yosemite National Park? If so, when did this occur and how serious was the impact?

Not in Yosemite, no. I help with fire suppression efforts, and there are parts of Northern California where every summer they're pretty well socked in for a month or two at a time. But I'm not aware of it being that much of a problem in Yosemite.

**

I have a small core of residents that...the smoke makes them crazy. They see smoke coming – one woman in fact leaves the area as soon as smoke comes. She's got breathing problems, and she calls me and says "where's the smoke coming from?" And we say "it's coming from Sequoia." "How long's it supposed to be?" "It's going to be for a week." "I'm leaving!" Because she lives right close to Sequoia. There's another woman who lives up in Swall Meadows by Bishop here (that looks down on the valley) and she says "the reason we moved here is for the clean air; you're screwing my air up. Do something about it! Stop the forest from burning. I don't want to see any more smoke."

But I think most people – not only with prescribed fires but occasionally we'll have a wild fire – what I tell people when I talk to the media is "we've got a really good indicator around here whether it's healthful or unhealthful. Go outside and stand in the middle of the valley. And can you see details of the mountains on either side of you? If you see details then the air is clean enough to do something outside. If you can't see those details, and all you can see is kind of a hazy outline of the mountains, stay inside." And generally at that level – standing in the middle of the Owens Valley here and looking 15 to 20 miles away – that level is about the state standard: about 50 micrograms.

We're used to having VERY CLEAN AIR HERE. And so it doesn't take very much smoke to get people excited. And so from a health standpoint, it's really not a health impact. It's more of a...an emotional thing.

More than anything though, it's an economic thing. People come up here during the summer to fish and hike, and camp. And they come from Los Angeles and the San Joaquin Valley where you can't see the mountains, and the air is hazy, and they expect to see clean air. And so generally, our air is just as clean as it can be during the spring and early summer. And then the burning starts, and all the people are here, and they come up and say "why are we here? It looks just like it did in the San Joaquin Valley." And THAT hurts our economy. And so there's a REAL economic impact when that smoke comes over from the west side.

**

Not that I've seen. We had such a great winter that really flushed the atmosphere...and for me, I don't see any real – like I say, there are some people that when smoke gets in the air, they really get impacted by it. By I think that is not the norm.

**

No...The only thing...some of the fires that the Park has done...in the community I know of people who have not been happy with that...When you're doing prescribed fires, sometimes you get that resident smoke sitting right in there, and people get a little cranky about that. And I respect that. But it's also: what are you doing for the land? There are trade-offs. I don't know about the health aspect, other than I know that they put UBANS (smoke monitors if you will) out and measure that. And I know that the Park is working with the air pollution control boards and all those folks, and coordinating with them. And I think the Park has done – they're kind of working two air districts. So they have a little more of a challenge in doing that. And I think they've been doing a pretty good job. I haven't been tracking it...Then when they're on the conference calls they talk about what they can do. And they've also modified their objectives in consideration of health issues and/or too much smoke in the air. They've stopped some incidents. Early on (years and years ago...I guess in the nineties) they had a fire – the Frog Fire – where it was laying too much smoke and they were directed by Air Quality basically to shut that down. And did. But it took up some time, and was a really tough thing for them to do – not necessarily from a ...it was a tough thing physically for them to do. But they did it. And they were a little bummed that they had to put it out. But, you know, that's part of the game.

**

Residents have shared with me the health impacts they have had more from the wildfires than RX burning. We try to talk about techniques or mitigation measures when it comes to their health – but many folks cannot leave the area while the smoke is in the air. I believe we can do a better job of trying to communicate this message.

**

Through our own programs here – whether it's our prescribed fire program or our natural fire program – we've done a lot of work over the last ten years educating the public. “This is what we're doing, and this is why we're doing it.” And trying to throw out the pluses and minuses, as opposed to having a wildfire run through the landscape and those impacts. But we have, maybe, a half a dozen people in the area that, because of respiratory problems, are going to complain if there's a campfire. And so if there's any smoke in the Owens Valley, we get the calls. There are a couple of websites up right now...ah, “prescribed fire baby killers” is one of them, I think. We're featured on the one website (some local people with respiratory problems). No matter what you do, they're going to be opposed to any smoke. And the approach we take is, we communicate with them A LOT. I inform them of everything we're doing when we put smoke in the air, and why. And oftentimes, they'll leave the area if they know well enough in advance; they'll just get out of the area and head someplace where there isn't smoke. So yes we over here are affected by smoke generated on the west side; in some respects it has undermined some good fire in the ecosystem education we've done.

**

Dealing with smoke. An interesting question. And since you asked whether it was on myself or folks around me or whatever I'll just share with you. I am a – I've been diagnosed with adult onset asthma. So smoke has an impact on me. Would I want them essentially to stop burning? Heck no! It's part of the ecosystem. It's part of something we need as humans – and especially Yosemite is that place where we need to see it, and experience it, and hold on to whatever is left of that ecosystem.

The Forest Service has tried to use fire as well, but I don't know that we're using it as much as our ecosystem on the national program has been altered somewhat – whether it's through fire or harvesting, or just protection (whatever that it).

Smoke on the community? I think I've already said there's going to be those naysayers, and there's going to be those people that have medical conditions that will be more impacted. There's a hole, though, like a lot of others that drive the complaints about – I think that...the public is supportive of having natural areas managed naturally. They don't like long periods of smoke; the longer that it goes on, the more upset they get. You know, being smoked in for a month is not fun for anybody. But an event that lasts a week to two week – maybe even a little longer – I think they're becoming more tolerant.

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No.

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Q-9 Sensitivity to Smoke. (Only asked of interviewees who have been personally affected by smoke) How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?

No. Suffer!

**

N/A.

**

N/A.

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Q-10 Your Vision of the Future & Proposed Actions. As you reflect upon your responses to Q-5 through Q-9: do you have any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies, related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.

Improved public communication and outreach. I know they have a regularly scheduled call-in meeting. And my burn guy actually calls in on occasion. That's good for the professionals, but then that sort of regular email / outreach to not necessarily the professionals but to guys like me – I don't do the burn program here. I'm in charge of it, but I've got a guy that works on it. So, I'm like the perfect one to know when the communication for the average person has not been sufficient.

Other than the outreach – like I said: these guys know what they're doing. They know the necessity for doing what they're doing. They have pretty short timeframes to get it done. They definitely have funding limitations...I'm not going to criticize how they do their job. They know far better than I do. All I know is the impact of them doing their job could be – the consequences of those impacts could be lessened with some outreach.

**

Continue to lead the rest of us, and society, and the public in the right direction. To continue to have fire on the landscape – whether it's through managed fire or use of natural fire. I think it's important that they do that. They've certainly got to learn from their mistakes when they have over achievements or they do impact the community – that will continue to improve like anybody, but I think relatively, their program is sound. And when they have those mistakes, they need to admit it to the public, so the public can move on to the next event. The public will...figure out what you're talking about if you try to hide something.

**

I'll just make it singularly clear: Joint collaboration would be wonderful. I don't know how to highlight it any more than that.

**

And once again, back to...whatever happens on the Westside affects us on the eastside. It comes this way. And it kind of ties in to some of the questions you've already asked. We've got some people over here that...smoke definitely affects them. And they complain. And they complain up to the highest levels. So, and oftentimes – in fact most of the time, the smoke's not even ours. It's from somebody sending it to us.

So, it would be “nice” if those land management agencies that are sending the smoke over the hill and forgetting about it would help us deal with those issues – those people, that public...I don't know if it would be through working with our media over here a little bit more to get the word out when something's going to happen; a little more advance in

making sure that through the media there's contact information (we've got two radio stations and one newspaper). I think just that. It would do double things: it would notify that public – especially that affected public – when something's going to happen, so they can take mitigation measures themselves (whether it's leaving the area). But it would also help in our effort – our ten year effort – to educate the public of the benefits of fire. And I know the Park Service certainly has – as one of the “Y” Parks – has more funds and more media and more professional writers available to write really good things than we do over here.

From an FMO standpoint (from the Stanislaus Fire Management Officer's standpoint), we should have like yearly – and we do at times; we're not totally disciplined at this – but to have yearly meetings to find out what the projects are, what some of the intentions are, how we're managing today, and what we are thinking about for the coming fire season or what have you. I think that would help.

The FMO over there (Kelly Martin) really tried to do that, but the timing – she was trying to get the Forest Supervisor here and the Park Superintendent and myself and she together. And the cards just didn't lay out. But I think what her idea is – and I think their intentions are – is a good one, and should be practiced. We should be doing that. We should be meeting at least every season at the beginning of the year to where that is.

We also do burning. You have to take into consideration the public perception – whether it be right or wrong – of what we're doing, and market what we're doing. Let them know. I mean, from a science base, we know that some of this stuff is the right thing to do. But at the same time, we need to get that from a science base to...the public, to make sure they understand why we're doing what we're doing.

In general, I had some problem with the Park in the sense that it was a pretty significant event last year with the Big Meadows Fire. It was overshadowed – I mean it would be national news...My hat's tipped off to their at that time Acting Park Superintendent, Dave Uberaga, who...you know, the question always arose “with what we know now, would you burn again?” And his answer was “yes.” But he also – and I mean in the “yes” – which was all they heard (and I was standing right beside him when he said that). And basically, that “yes” was the only thing that was heard, and wasn't well received. And really what he did, he caveated it “with the lessons that we have learned from today.” And that's what I think. And I believe we all learned a lesson. And just the public didn't hear that. And I think...and it's tricky to articulate to the folks that “yeah, we need all the tools in the tool box, and we would probably do another burn like that in the time that they did that.” And I think the whole key is in making sure we can articulate that to the public to where they understand it.

I think they're the ones that ought to be looked to for the practices and successes. They're the good leaders in that, I think. And we take from them. We do work together – although it hasn't quite coalesced into a very functional program yet – but the two Parks and the three Forests – and the Inyo on the other side – have formed a group. And we've got a website called "Sierra Wildland Fire Reporting System" (SWFRS) that was put together. And it was designed – we meet twice a year. We plug in our prescribed fires, locations, and our wildfires that we're managing. And this was kind of a win-win type of thing. For them to know what we're doing, and that we're allowing them to know how much smoke we're putting in the air, and that kind of thing. But it gives us – "well ok, the Park's got several big burns up there, so we're going to wait until they calm down before we light ours" or "we won't manage these fires; we'll go in and suppress it for now." And SWFRS was put together for that purpose. Now, have I used it? No, I probably haven't used it very much.

I'm probably not that familiar with the Park's plans – where they've done fuels work and where they currently have plans to ...If you're asking for specific areas that I think need treatments, I probably couldn't give you advice on that.

I do think that information is really critical, and to keep engaging the public as much as possible, and use it as an opportunity to educate them and provide some alternative viewpoints to people's opinions that fire is bad. Dealing with the smoke impacts with the air boards is a challenge to us because they need to understand that we're probably going to put smoke in the air one way or another – whether it's through wildfire or whether it's through something that we plan and we can maybe do when the weather is more optimal and there isn't going to be as much smoke impact on surrounding communities. It seems to me that Yosemite staff are in a pretty nice place, because there's not a large population to the east of them (which is where the smoke usually goes).

For me, I think in order for them to continue to house such a pristine environment in the Park, they need to increase their prescribed fire management program. But also, in my estimation, to probably do some fuel removal that is not typical to the Park. In other words, we do a lot of cutting and chipping here – and I don't believe in their environment they do as much as that. And that might be something that would help reduce some additional fuels, especially that stuff that is laying on the ground which they really...you know, that's part of Nature. That's part of a natural working environment. And for me, it's something that's going to cause increase in fire activity. And so, I would like to see it removed – where I don't think they do. So that not only do they increase their prescribed fire program, but they could also do a lot more clearing and removal of the down and dead – from my perspective. I don't believe it's their perspective at all.

Q-11 Specific Actions. What specific actions would you like to see to move the Fire Management Program from where it is now to where you would like it to be in the future? What role do you see the Fire Management Program playing in such actions? Please be as specific as possible.

I would just encourage them to continue their active fuels management program, and to do it with as much public interaction as possible, and keep using it as an opportunity to explain to the public the importance of reducing fuels – in California in particular. And then also to continue to allow fire to play as close to a natural role as it can. Because there are just so few landscapes in California where we can let wildfires act as they should. And that seems like such a great place to have it be a laboratory and more naturally managed than a lot of the rest of the Sierras are.

I worked on the Stanislaus National Forest before I came here (to BLM), and we had a couple of fires that burned on both the Park and the Forest. The cooperation was just excellent. We had somebody from the Park come over and help us do the planning so that we were incorporating their concerns into the plan early on, and following their concerns (they were more restrictive than the Forest Service was in terms of mechanical equipment like dozers and things like that). And that was fine. We were able to accommodate that.

So, just making sure that all three agencies are aware of each other's policies and desires. But I think where fire is concerned, we tend to have fairly common goals for the most part. One of our challenges is that Cal Fire is responsible for fire suppression on the BLM lands adjacent to Yosemite, and we don't have any of our own equipment. Cal Fire response tends to be a little heavy-handed sometimes. Their method of putting out fires is to get a lot of equipment in and put it out as quickly as possible. And they're not trained and they're not funded to fight fires with the finesse that sometimes the Federal agencies would prefer that they use.

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Collaborative engagement in the beginning. Especially, engagement in the beginning of the planning process, and looking at how we can both bring a learning perspective. Certainly, the Superintendent and the District Ranger need to be engaged in this joint collaborative effort. The fire programs for both the Park and the Forest work very cooperatively. We have shared staff and engines. I believe that the fire programs are a template for us working closer together on other resources.

I understand that our publics want more inclusion in the planning and possibly implementation components of RX burning. I have offered venues for our publics to engage – have not had any real commitments from them. Sometimes, the frustration for land managers is that it's the vocal minority. And, all I can do is keep the door open...All I can do is keep throwing it out there to say let's work together.

**

Well, I would – my suggestion is and will be to refine SWFRS and use it more. And to come up with a set of protocols or guides that would force us to go to that program and use it. And if it's not to our benefit – if there are other programs out there, or doing things differently that get the job done – then let's do away with it. But it seems to me that it's a good source. And we're a leader in this region, I believe, in that realm to manage smoke in the environment.

I think if we used it more – and this year is a poor example since there's so little activity anyway. But in past years, if we would have utilized it more, we could have hopefully “sold” smoke or “sold” use of fire in the environment more to the regulators (APCDs) and the county boards of supervisors, and that kind of thing, a little better.

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Regarding the marketing of science-based information to the public: Well I think that sometimes [we need to] keep having them in the plan (putting them in the plan) in the sense of those periodic updates (“here's what we're doing”) and keeping them up to date. Because I know they watch. I know that the public is watching. They're probably a little more primed last year – a little more sensitive than they have been in the past. And I think that we also have to be cognizant of their living (how they're making their dollars) – which I believe we are – but we need to also kind of make sure that if we're going to burn on weekends, or burn on the holidays (like what happened last year) we recognize that, and we weigh that – I don't know if you call it a “risk” – but we weigh that opportunity...If some things do go wrong, with how we're affecting others. And I think that the public at that point has to have a little bit of buy-in, and they go “yeah, we support what they're doing in the Park.”

Undoubtedly, I think that everybody there felt that “we all have a piece of the pie here.” So again, [we need to] incorporate [the public] a little bit, and all that; not necessarily planning it all out, but just being in the loop, and interaction.

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By increasing their fire management program, I mean bolstering their program with additional people, funds, and prescribed fire projects.

Regarding fuel removal: I'm not aware that they're doing anything. I'm not aware of any fuel reduction program, other than by prescribed fire. In other words, I don't believe they're spraying; I don't believe they're cutting and chipping; and I believe that, because it's not in their focus.

**

Well, in particular: if they're going to have a large prescribed fire (where they're going to put a lot of smoke in the air) or a large natural fire (that will do the same thing: put a lot of smoke in the air) and send it over here – smoke tends to sink in the valley here. They need to make the local population aware of that. And keep delivering that message. As it is, we're passing on information as fast as we can, but we're not getting much from the Park (in assistance and that).

I think Yosemite needs to do more public outreach over here. We get their air pollution, and they think they're doing a good job if their air pollution comes our direction. You know, so much of the burning that both the parks do – and not only the parks, but the national forest as well – that's the kind of stuff that goes for months and months and months – you know, lightning strikes sometime burn all summer long. And they think that it's great as long as the smoke comes this way.

I think it's important that there be some sort of outreach BEFORE the program starts. You know, when does Yosemite intend to do – what kind of a summer can we expect with smoke from Yosemite? Do they have a lot of things planned; do they have a lot of funding, or big areas? Or, there's not going to be much? So in those years when they've got a lot planned, maybe a little bit of outreach saying “remember, Yosemite has an ambitious program this year. We're going to be staying in touch and letting everybody know.” Just sort of letting people know that smoke might be coming in a couple of weeks or the next couple of months. Not reactive, but pro-active.

Well, I think that the more they put themselves in the news, the more accessible it becomes to the public. In other words, if they have a prescribed fire or a lightning fire that they're managing (some kind of fire on the landscape) – even if it becomes routine to them – it's never routine to the public. The public is constantly changing. So by continuing to release that information to the public adjusts the public perspective. I think it adjusts the other agencies' around them as well (we're plant managers or fire managers, but were also readers of the news and viewers of the news).

Q-12 Inaction. What would be your concerns if what you proposed is not acted upon?

We'd just go along like we're going along. We'd deal with the complaints, still, through our office. Our media people would try to cover as best we could with the information that we get.

**

I think it would be attacks on the program. It would be just trying to stop things that are good – for a whole bunch of other reasons – I think it will end up trying to impede some of that progress. So that's why I think of getting [the public] more on board, and getting on the side of understanding. The Boards of Supervisors are getting the phone calls, and they're reacting to them. And so, it's almost like a door to door thing going "hello, Mrs. Jones, let's tell you what we're doing." I think in the future this is going to become more and more important as time goes by.

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I think the outcome of them not continuing on with a progressive prescribed fire management program is going to be continued large and damaging uncontrolled wildfires. And that is the bottom line.

**

The same old thing. A couple of years ago we had the problem with Yosemite. I don't really know...We complained not to Yosemite but directly to the San Joaquin program (since there's more respect between our two agencies). I called them and said, "Look guys, we've had it." And they said "No, we've had it, too. We're doing what we can with the Yosemite officials." So, I've always got that ability to call their Air Pollution Control Officer over there, and I can say, "Look, we're strangling over here. Do what you can." Because it's not in my boundary; it's outside of my boundary and there's nothing that I can do about it.

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Well, they'd still implement their program, but...not communicating with the public is a problem. The public demands information. If you don't give them information, they'll start rumors or untruths about you to ensure that you deliver the news to them. And I think that it's wrong to try to control the public with your "spin" You need to release timely and accurate information; but by doing that you manage information. And if you are behind the curve then the public is going to manage the information. But if we focus

on just exactly what is happening, and stay away from the policy question, I think they will still be successful.

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Well, I think the downside would be that there's less opportunity for us as land management agencies all together obtaining the confidence of the public. "Well, you're doing this and they're doing that yet you guys both manage the same piece of dirt or same type of dirt – why aren't you doing the same thing?" Even though the Park Service and the Forest Service are on two different missions – as far as fire in the ecosystem we're of the same mind. We need to keep educating the public, and let them understand that fire is a natural part of it, and we'll all be better off. If we don't work together and tell them that – and the public mistrusts government, to begin with – then the government speaks two different stories.

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Q-13 Personal Commitment and Responsibility. How do you see yourself personally involved in bringing about your suggested changes?

About six years ago I negotiated an agreement with them that said, essentially, "go ahead and burn what you want; just don't affect any communities. If you affect any communities, then you can't burn for six months after that." And so, they're motivated. In order to keep their program going, they're motivated to do the right thing. Not only that, but if they screw up, then I can say to them, "you guys screwed up, and you can't burn for six months. So I'm penalizing you." And so for my public who has to breathe that smoke, I say to the public, "I prohibited them from burning for six months. We apologize. I guarantee it's not going to happen for six more months." And that has really...it's not just the agreement that causes us to get along, but that process developed a relationship – and it's just a really CLOSE relationship. They call all the time, and we know exactly what's going on.

You know, the fourth Saturday of April is a high, holy holiday here. It's the opening of fishing season! It's the biggest thing that the Eastern Sierra has every year. And a couple of years ago, the Forest Service lit a prescribed burn – the Wednesday before the last Saturday in April. And that last Saturday came, and Lake Crowley was full of smoke. It was awful! The tourists come up here expecting to have clear, blue skies. So we sat down with the Forest Service and said "look guys: you CAN'T BURN in that part of April! We understand that's a good time of the year, because things haven't really heated up yet, and there might be a little bit of snow cover still. And you guys like to burn then. But you CAN'T BURN DURING THAT PERIOD!" And they said "we absolutely understand. It will never happen again." And so, there's been that relationship. People need to know who to talk to.

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Well, this is my thirty-third year, and I'm not going to be around much longer! My personal commitment is, as it's always been my whole career, I'm 100% --and 110% most of the time. And certainly I'm going to support any of the land management agencies' mission.

Well, for me, being outside (being another agency), my opportunities don't come about often. But I described to you the opportunity that we had on the Telegraph Fire. Also, there is an occasion where we meet a couple of times a year just to talk about our fire preparedness in general each year. And that affords me an opportunity to talk about those types of issues. And so, I don't have much of an influence other than the occasional conversation with the folks that are doing that type of work.

I don't know that – because everybody needs an extra plate to put all their things on – I don't know we have the opportunity to meet and talk enough. And we probably should have a more structured format to do that. And it probably should be something along the lines of every three months as opposed to every bad fire – if you get my drift. And so, for me, that would be a suggestion. And I think that it would be well received by all agencies. We do sit down and talk (we talk with the Forest Service; we talk with the Park) a couple of times a year, and it's basically based on the upcoming fire season. So, it's more behind the eight ball than it is in front of the thing.

Well, as the Program Manager for the Sierra National Forest, it's a big part of my job working with Yosemite as cooperators, and trying to get common language and common terms, and common goals, in place. We do it the best we can. There's a lot of shifting going on in management. And I've just got a new boss (Forest Supervisor), and I know the Sequoia's not quite as new, but she's been there a couple of years. And the new Superintendent is brand new. I think that's part of it. And one thing I've noticed: the Park Superintendent is such a different job than the Forest Supervisor. He needs to be much more politically connected –especially in a Park like this surrounded by conservative-minded counties – it would be pretty frustrating, and you'd have to be a special person to deal with this. And maybe this is why they don't last long!

I guess I'm committed to say that I'd like this to evolve. We need to be able to communicate each others' messages and fully understand the process on each land piece.

We enacted the lessons learned [from the Big Meadows Fire] here [with regard to the Forest Service not moving ahead with their planned burn in the Groveland area around the 4th of July]. We did that mindfully, because of that very thing – like I said, their

livelihood, their businesses could be affected. It was one of those where we put it back and just said “no, okay, we won’t burn.” It was of short duration, and we would do it during the weekdays, and not weekends.

I don’t know that I see a role for myself with Yosemite. I see a role for myself with the Forest Service, since they’re my employer. I’m trying to bring them along, but – I still have to play that risk role because we’re on the other side of the hill so that we don’t follow them identically; because we are in a different part of the ecosystem, and our risks are different. We’re really separated by that Sierra bridge, if you will; we talk to each other, we email each other, but our communication certainly isn’t what it should be. But...when I think about where I would improve it, I don’t know that I would focus on Yosemite. I think I would focus more on the cooperators on the eastern side of the Sierra, and build us up. There’s some cooperation with Yosemite...It’s more of what we need to do over on this side of the hill to move forward. If I expend too much energy communicating with Yosemite, I’m probably not doing the job in my own backyard. So, I need to bring BLM along, and they need to bring me along, and they’re both important—to communicate that fire in the ecosystem is good for local cooperators.

Well I think we (BLM) would be happy to support whatever the Park is proposing in terms of burning, fuels work, putting smoke in the air. I think we could talk about why all that is important to do from a management perspective. And certainly we could coordinate projects that we have with the Park. I would be highly supportive of meetings or planning to do this.

Q-14 Interest in Public Participation. Would you be interested in participating in facilitated dialogues with Fire Management Program staff and other interested people concerning fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding area? If so, do you have any suggestions regarding how you would like such dialogues to be organized and facilitated?

This already occurs.

It’s ok for fire managers to be a part of the dialogue. If we’re going to go down that road, it’s the line officers that make the decisions that need to be a part of that target audience as well. It also needs certain political components to it. I’ll make it clear that I am in no way, shape or form proposing lobbying (as a civil service employee). I would never do that. But if we want to change the landscape, the line officers, the deciders, the folks from the executive branch, have to be a part of it. And so does the Congress and the

representatives and their staff – so that they understand the issue and can move forward on it.

Absolutely. I think what was demonstrated last year to me at the town hall meetings was: now the Park had to internalize and go through their investigation, and fact finding, and then get the recommendations. I know the Park at one point came back and did an artful job at one of the Gateway Partners meeting of describing what was going to go on, how they were proceeding. But we never – we haven't had that facilitated dialogue. Again, it was the one-way communication. And I think – from even the last month or so – with communications through emails of community when they did their prescribed burn when I did mine – there's still the distrust out there. And I think we need to have that dialogue.

Such meetings should occur at least before the season starts. I would definitely do a joint one to talk about what our program would be, and to garnish their feedback and to see where we could get them inducted in some of the planning and implementation side, if that's what it took.

I think that the Park is doing a good job keeping people engaged in planning processes. They have days where they invite the public to come in and learn about all the projects the Park is planning. Maybe there are opportunities to allow public and media observers to come when there's a prescribed fire going on. And especially the media – maybe it's a little more problematic with the general public – if you could invite people to come and observe, and see how the fires are lit, and how they're managed, I think that might be really helpful. To try to get media to go up when we're monitoring some of the lightning-caused fires with very minimal personnel involved – if you could get someone to go up there from the media standpoint and report back on the good things that that fire is doing, and how it's not having a lot of impact on visitors – I think that would probably be a kind of attitude to take, too. And I think some follow-up tours would be great! You know, like that part of Yosemite Valley that was burned a couple of years ago. Maybe do some naturalist-led tours a year or two afterwards, and talk about how the area is coming back, and what changed with the fire (what the benefits were; if there were any negative effects from the fire) and talk about those...I would think the Gateway Partners could offer an optional fieldtrip, since it seems they're half-day meetings with lunch.

I have staff that participates more than I do. But I'd like to as well, as time permits.

In 2008 I was involved in a couple of community town hall meetings (in regards to the 2008 fires and smoke, and most of them were in the Park), and they were facilitated by the Park's Mr. Shackelton. It was mostly for the homeowners and the visitors in the

Wawona area (because we had a fire that was threatening them). It went well. It was well facilitated. A town-hall type meeting.

I don't do a lot of day-to-day interaction with the Park. We have our two annual meetings where we all get together to discuss our programs, and that kind of thing. And of course when we have events that are bordered on each other and shared with each other, then we discuss things. I'm trying to think back over my tenure here. When I was on the district as the District Fire Management Officer, I worked with some of the Park's operational staff. Then when I went to headquarters as Deputy Chief, not so much – just their normal meetings. As Deputy Chief and Chief, we don't interact a whole lot, other than our annual meeting. And if we have a big event – and we've only had one, and that was in 2008, when we had all those fires. We were on the tail end of all those lightning fires that happened in early June, and the Park had some and we had some bordered along the Park. And we had some "interesting" interactions then, and...it wasn't adversarial by any means.

Just back to – once again the media coverage, and that kind of information flowing a little better on to the eastside here. But – not really. I don't think so. We're kind of isolated over here. While we have common boundaries with a lot of other land management agencies, there's a BIG WALL that separates us. While we have that boundary in common, we don't have much else.

I would call them – and now I switch hats to that of an Incident Commander – we have town hall meetings giving updates on the fire and what we're planning, and how many resources and all those kinds of things. But I think that those town hall meetings are invaluable. You're close to the community, and you touch down, and those are the ones that are going to be generally most affected. And you lay out your intentions.

Like I did yesterday. I had the BLM burn guy come to Rotary. He sort of acted like that was unusual – that it was the first Rotary meeting he had ever been to. We need to see them regularly.

I'm a member of a Rotary Club here in Bishop, and July was my month to arrange the program. Yesterday, I had this very topic discussed by Dale Johnson (he's a fire manager for BLM / Forest Service here in Bishop). I had Dale come and talk to my Rotary Club yesterday, just to explain the importance of the burn program. The public needs to understand that the burning really needs to take place. We've got a GREAT relationship with our local BLM / Forest Service.

I know that that the park has pr type people. Just, come over here once in a while! Schedule maybe a week of – it's Tuesday afternoon for Rotary in Bishop, Wednesday morning is Mammoth Rotary – just figure out who you need to go talk to. And you do a little bit of outreach. We don't have tv around here; it's all radio. Our newspapers are very understaffed – if you prepare a story and you do all the work, they'll publish it. And so, send some cool pictures over, and write a story, and they'll get it out.

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Q-15 Interest in Personal Dialogue with Fire Management Program Personnel.

Would you be interested in having someone from the Fire Management Program contact you to discuss your concerns and ideas?

I'd go along if there was a new coalition put together. Limited participation. To focus on Yosemite; if it focused on the rest of the Sierra, of course, I'm in.

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Probably not. But again, I will talk with my folks in the field offices to make sure that they're getting whatever information they think they need. I think that's happening. You know, those fire staff tend to talk to each other...I would assume that they're staying in touch with each other. And we do get fires on our land that could be a threat to the Park, I think they do a pretty good job of coordinating that as well.

**

In the last five years or so I've seen a real shift – the public is sort of starting to “get it.” I know they are. Ten years ago, the burners' (whether Forest Service or the park) reputation was just awful for this kind of thing. And they've done some outreach in the area. Over time we've realized that it's either low burns now or suffer the big burns later. And these people kind of get that message.

But just reinforce it.

**

Already taken care of.

**

It has been a few years since our fire staffs have formally met. It's time!

**

I can pick up the phone. We have that quite a bit.

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Yeah. I think as far as what we can do to help them. It's a program where we provide hand crews to assist them in their projects. Professionally speaking, if they need an engine; if they need support – we are engaged with them that way. Personally for me, I don't feel that there's a need. I think I can get as much dialogue as I need professionally.

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N/A

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Q-16 Receiving more information. Would you be interested in receiving more detailed information describing the Park's current guidelines governing decision-making? If you are interested, please note that only your name and telephone number (and not your responses to these questions) will be provided to Fire Management Program personnel.

I think we get some of those. We get those where they've made those decisions, and we're pretty much in the loop. If it was the public, then I'd have a whole different answer. But from a government to a government, we get that information.

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No. They're real good about sending the word out.

**

Not really. I think I receive enough through our meetings and discussions, and phone calls.

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Absolutely! It would be for my fire guy. That I like about what Sequoia-Kings does: they have a call, and if you're interested you can call in. If there's a little bit of smoke over by Sequoia, we probably wouldn't call in. But if it got bigger, then having that ability to call in daily or participate in the smoke meeting is a good idea.

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The Park ensured our inclusion in the sharing of the recommendations.

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No. I think that they need to continue to communicate what they're doing, just like we need to communicate the work we're doing. Am I interested in another meeting once a year? Or even once a month, or anything? Probably not. But I'm interested in a bigger group meeting once a year.

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Q-17 If **\$10 million dollars** were to become available for use within the Yosemite region and you were the person able to decide just how those funds would be used, how would you spend them? While your priority might focus exclusively on Yosemite's fire management program, please don't feel limited in your response.

Let me clarify that question. So, \$10 million would be offered to the Park to do something with? I would like to change the story.

So, if the Park received \$10 million, I would hope there would be an incentive to collaborate. I think based on this discussion that funds could be directed to develop the non-fire component – more of the social and economic piece.

I believe to give it some legitimacy, a non-profit entity could be a convener in this and allow the federal partners to be just at the table instead of us driving the process.

**

They do a lot of prescribed fire already. I would see a real opportunity – you know, they've done this for many, many years – they have an opportunity to do fantastic studies and more convincing evidence that fire is part of their environment. I would put it into their prescribed fire program, as much as the airshed will allow.

I think it would be more down on the borders – share it (e.g., the prescribed fire program) with us. Combine programs with us. I mean, we're looking at doing that up in the top end of this drainage, anyway. We could do that in the Merced River canyon – there are some areas over there that could use some reintroduction. And I'm sure the Stanislaus [National Forest] has some areas that they'd like to work.

**

I'd put it on the ground! To do exactly what they're doing: more prescribed fire, and more use of fire through the resources. It would be the same educational component they do for the burn schedule, except they need to spend a little more time on a management focus.

Ten years ago Clinton left us with the national fire plan. And it improved all of our capabilities. And some folks would argue that more of it should have gone towards this or that, or more towards communication, or more should have gone towards science, and research. I would fall on the side of doing more. Certainly if you had \$10 million dollars

you could communicate a little more. Don't get me wrong, but I would put it into operations: prescribed fire and resources that can manage fire (management modules, management plans, management individuals) so that you have the capacity to assess fire when it comes to you.

If there was anything else additional I would add, I would just repeat what I said: I think our capacity to manage fire on the landscape is where we all need to be. To run with a suppression organization for years and years and years and that can be converted and adapted to fire management. I think we need to continue to shift that focus.

Well I have to tell you being a sister Department of Interior agency, we always figure the Park Service has way more money than they need, anyway. So they could give it to the BLM!

I don't know enough about the Park's programs and how they're funded to answer that question. I'm sure that their fuels program could use some additional funding; and probably a portion of that \$10 million dollars should go towards that. The fuels program would benefit from an infusion of funds.

From my perspective (from the fire prevention / suppression perspective), that money would be put in programs to enhance what I would be trying to accomplish – which would be prescribed fire, or...the problem with receiving money like that is that there's too many strings attached. Number one. Number two: the money doesn't last (it's not something you're always going to see). And so, you can't really build people into your program. And I think, quite honestly, if you want to be successful in the prescribed fire management world, you have to have the right quality of people for your program to be successful. And many times, we cannot afford to do that.

If \$10 million dollars became available, focus on outreach. I don't even know if they've got a burn program website. Do they? Something that you could – you know, “when you see smoke, go here.” And “here” says “this is where we're burning today. And here is some more information about burning.” So a newbie (a person who hasn't been on there before) can click on one of those slide shows to see how important it is. So, kind of a one stop take for the public. Does Sequoia have that?

With fire in general in California, when people read information about fire, it's sort of weird. There are so many fire websites that you can go to, but it doesn't seem like any of them are great, to me. It would be nice to have some sort of coordinated “wildfire / prescribed fire resource” in California – or even the west. You know there's InfoWeb. Do you know that one? It's kind of cool. You can open up maps and zoom in on maps,

but then again it's got limited information. Or you can go to the California Department of Forestry and they've got lots of information, but it's only on the fires that they're involved with.

The public doesn't know whether it's a national forest fire, a park service fire, whether Cal Fire is fighting it or not. Where do you go when you know there's smoke in the air? It would be nice if there were a coordinated clearinghouse. "If you live in Bishop and you see smoke in the air today, it's probably coming from Sequoia. Click here for more information."

In sum, we've covered it pretty well. Like I said, we understand the fact – and I think I have become a more understanding supporter of their effort. When I first got started, "those damn burners; they're sending smoke our way again." I tell people. I say "Look. This is not something that we like. It's something that's for the greater good. But this is what we're doing to minimize its impact on you." And it's that last part ("this is what we're doing to minimize that impact on you") that we can really use some help with. And that the agreement that I have with the local guys is a step in the right direction. "Do your program, but if there's a screw-up that impacts a community, AND YOU'RE WILLING TO PAY FOR IT..." The Park Service would never [enter] into any agreement like that.

I like the \$10 million dollar question! There has been some talk on our forest – and I think there's been some initial meetings about – I think the Park wants to move some housing and things out of Tuolumne Meadows down canyon. And certainly, we support that idea. One of our biggest problems over here is housing for employees. We have a very high cost of living over here, and we have very limited land available for houses. Which drives the cost of housing sky high. And so I think there's been some negotiations about actually Yosemite constructing housing facilities on the Forest Service property that is down canyon. Which is a wonderful idea. I can really support that.

That would be a wonderful use of that \$10 million dollars!

I don't know enough about what their needs are. So I don't think I can totally answer that. But if it went into fire programs, that's fine. And I would hope that they would continue doing some of the work that they've been doing. They've been doing some good work. I don't know if it's been advertised necessarily, and everybody understands that. They've been doing a lot of good work (using mechanical work to grind the brush) out at Foresta. In fact, that was pivotal. Down in the El Portal area, they did some mastication around some homes and saved some homes when that fire did escape, and also saved it from slipping down into the Merced Canyon – which was pivotal. If it had got down there, we would have potentially had a whole bunch of structures lost, and more time to where we shut down the Park. So, I think that the work they did prior was money well

spent. And if they're doing those kinds of projects, I'm in! I think that's a smart thing to do. In the long run, the \$10 million would benefit you by hundreds of millions – by not coming in there and suppressing the fires. Front-end load that into the fuels management part and get the wolf away from the door prior to having it coming.

**

Q-18 Additional Comments. Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you'd like to add?

I think things are going really well between BLM and the Park Service – especially with the support we're getting at the Briceburg Visitor's Center right now. That's been a really excellent experience for the public. A lot of the people who do stop there are on their way to Yosemite and have questions about the Park. So it's been great to have somebody from the Park that can answer those questions more reliably. And I know they've got really good ties back to the Mariposa Chamber of Commerce.

**

With respect to Yosemite National Park: we have a minimal relationship, but it's a good relationship. I personally know Kelly Martin, the FMO. So, I know that if I need anything or need that information all I have to do is call. We're old friends – way back. We went through the Technical Fire Management (TFM) program at Washington State (Reed Kennedy was in charge of the program).

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NPS Study Responses – Businesses, Chambers of Commerce, Tourism

Q-1 Relationship to Yosemite National Park. I'd like to begin by asking you to describe your "connection" to Yosemite National Park (and the Fire Management Program, if possible)

I have a connection to Yosemite National Park – for two reasons. Number one: I'm a member of the Yosemite Gateway Partners, and I am the Chamber of Commerce (Yosemite Chamber of Commerce) President here in Groveland and south county / highway 120 all the way to the Park. And then I am also on the South County Planning Group Committee as a Commissioner. The South County encompasses all the way from Lake Don Pedro, Mocassin clear to the gateway with Highway 140...

**

I'm not an expert, obviously. I live in the mountain area. I've been here 27 years. I've been involved in tourism probably about 20 of those years, to some extent.

**

I grew up in Mammoth, and my real job – my real profession, anyway – is ski patrol. I'm a professional ski patroller down in Mammoth, and I have been for 20 years. And I've been here in Lee Vining for about eleven years now. I bought the store eleven years ago. And so, I'm pretty much an eastsider, and my relationship to Yosemite is pretty much from Olmstead Point this way. I don't get down to the Valley too much. So that's probably a little different than most people you talk to.

**

Is this interview the result of last year's incident with the control burn getting out of control? If I understood you correctly, this has been a process that has been in play for awhile.

I've been here for fifteen years. I started out as a desk clerk at Cedar Lodge, and now I'm Vice President for our company and oversee Yosemite View Lodge, Cedar Lodge, and Savage's Trading Post down the road, and also the Indian Flat RV Park. I'm in charge of operations, marketing and sales. I love the area, and love living here. I'm originally from Oklahoma. I moved to California in 1991. I lived in the Bay Area for about three years, and then lived up here.

We work well with Delaware North (the concessionaire in the Park) through the Gateway Partners. We actually have been able to work really well with the Park Service...And with the last couple of Supervisors, it seems like the communication between the Park and the gateway communities has gotten much better. So, that's an improvement I've seen.

**

We (the Chamber of Commerce and the businesses we represent) are the southern gateway to Yosemite National Park.

**

Professionally, I'm the Executive Director for the Mariposa County Chamber of Commerce, and so the Chamber of Commerce has a position on the Yosemite Gateway Committee. I attend the quarterly meetings in the Park in attempts to stay abreast that the department works within the Park as much as they want to give presentations to us...and through that we're able to keep a relationship with the other gateway communities at large; other than that, the Chamber of Commerce operates through contract to Visitor's Centers (there are two of them in Mariposa County) for the county, of 18 employees. We manage, and keep them trained, and seek support from the Park through the Ranger entry stations and systems, to come down and further staff's park education. It's an on-season, off-season relationship, so on-season we're fully staffed operating Mariposa's Visitor's Center thirteen hours a day, seven days a week; Coulterville operates at least nine hours a day, seven days a week.

**

Q-2 Sources of Information for Fire Management Activities and Events. What are your preferred sources of information for learning about Fire Management Program activities and events? Why are these sources preferred?

They always do a great job letting us all know when there's fire – whether they're controlled fires or wild fires. My preferred method is email. And then the website that they provide the information. We always link to that when there is a fire, so that we can provide updates. They're always really good at providing up-to-the-minute information.

**

I have been – I was pretty active with the Gateway Partner group – especially when Mike Tollefson came into the Park and took that over. He was real aggressive in his outreach to the gateway communities. (He's just a great guy. And we really appreciate that). So, I was trying to make most of the meetings when the Pass was open. But gosh, I haven't been to one in a couple of years now. And it's not because I'm not interested in what the group's doing, it's difficult to get down there. I'm an owner-manager here this year. I was not able to hire a manager this year due to the economy. So it's really tough to get away. But they formed that new Gateway corporation or foundation (or whatever it is) and they're doing a great job. Our supervisor here – our county supervisor – is pretty active with the group. So, I kind of defer to him.

And I'm not really a marketer – which the group is more into the marketing issues. Which is not really my forte. I'm not really a Chamber of Commerce guy; I'm more of an operations guy. And they're more focused on marketing – which is great! Somebody's got to do that. So I haven't been to one of those in a couple of years. I haven't met the new Superintendent yet. I was hoping to before the summer is over. I hear he's a great guy.

Emails directly to me, or to info@groveland.org, which is our Chamber of Commerce email regarding any plans – any future fires, prescriptive burns which happen prior to them actually starting them, so we could put some sort of input – a friendly input – to the Park. That communication works quite well. Basically, if you can get it in an email, that's the best way to get it; rather than having a missed phone call or anything else like that. It is a FAST source of getting information out. The Park Service sends emails to us so that we can alert our particular areas.

At this particular point in time (because of my insistence) have got a great contact with ALL of the Park Service people. Before, when we received it from Yosemite, it was not distributed as fast as it should have been.

Definitely e-mail. Definitely the websites. We can get into the National Forest websites, NPS (National Park). If there is a well-publicized and well maintained web system – that would be by far the most useful to us. I don't have the daily responsibility as much as the front office does. I know that our people up front have found ways to get information. Sometimes if it's snow-related, sometimes they'll call back into the Cal Trans yard that's in the yard to get a report from a facilities guy. They have their own little contacts – private cell phones of Park employees – but if there was a good, well maintained website that we could go to...A good example was the way that we had to learn information about a recent (10 pm to 6 am) traffic interruption and closing while they were replacing some rails or sidings on the bridges – and how that information came to us. It started as hearsay, and then ultimately came out as fact – but it took another whole day to get the good information. And all of that stuff could be easily published and kept up, and would certainly serve the public better.

There are issues where information out of the Park having to do with fire, or the winter road conditions...and the occasional Cal Trans repairs are happening. On Highway 41, for instance, there was some night-time road repair activity happening over there on the 41 gateway. But it's always been a little bit of a time lag for us to get timely snow conditions when people want to know whether they should commit to a day in the Park or a night – especially if they've traveled a good distance to get this far.

So, if that was made easier to get to, that would certainly be of value.

**

I think there's a pretty good understanding in the community here, anyway, that the Park Service is doing a pretty good job of informing people of the necessity for control burns, to remove the fuel, for a healthy forest environment. So I think in the past, the Park Service has done a good job of relaying that kind of information.

I think one of the things that they're doing now for the control burns or even the ones that get started by lightning or whatever: they're sending out an email – Gary (I don't know what his last name is) sends those out. That's really good information for us.

We need to know if there's going to be a control burn started, where it's going to be, so we can potentially see if it's going to impact us, or not. So that's good.

When there are significant burns that are happening – and they've done this, either last year, or the year before – we actually had a communication guy who was making stops, and coming in and giving us flyers or even putting up an information board. When we start getting smoke in this area, it is very helpful to have that information board up. Again, one from the Park Service that says “this is what we're doing, these are the impacts, this is what is normal, and this is what you should expect to see or hear or smell in the area.” In the last couple of years, the Park Service has been really good about that. What that does for us, is when somebody drives up and they smell the smoke, their first thought is “forest fire!” Second thought is “how close is it?” “Is it in control or out of control?” And, “am I safe here?” And being able to have that information board that says, basically “here you are, here's the control burn, we've got crews on it, and we anticipate it's going to burn for five days, ten days, fifteen days or whatever, and these are going to be the impacts: you're going to smell smoke, see smoke in the evenings and the mornings.” It really helps us to allow our guests to know that even though it is a forest fire, the likelihood of being evacuated is pretty slim – unless it gets out of control. And if it does, we're going to know that.

**

What has become really important for us are the quarterly gateway meetings. And it's actually now a non-profit organization, so we've actually become official, basically, as information gathering people with Yosemite. We've been talking about this for three to four years. So now it's actually an official meeting. The Superintendent has about an hour, at least, to speak on that. Plus, we have other people who are guest speakers. So that is I think the best place for us to get information, because every corridor is as important as we are, and they are all represented. And those are the people that get the information to the public and to other people, and those are the people who can say “now wait a minute; this doesn't sound right in our terms. Can we have a voice?”

**

Q-3 Your Understanding of Fire Management’s Decision-Making Process. Could you please briefly describe your understanding of how Fire Management decisions are arrived at within Yosemite National Park?

I’ve been educated through Gateway and through some of the Superintendent’s programs that it’s not a single person making that decision. There are systems in place; I would say that for all intents and purposes they probably have a very good system out there. And just like race car driving: you can have a perfectly good running car, and a team, and you still have that occasional accident. It’s a numbers game...The perfect storm crosses the sea once in a while, and no matter what you try to do, somebody just doesn’t have a good experience. The same can happen with fires. So, it’s the patterns that I look for – and what I encourage Chamber members and people in town to look for. Just watch for patterns. If you see lots – an extraordinary number of fires starting which are supposed to be managed – then we have an issue. But I’ve been in these foothills ten years and I can’t even tell you that I know of two or three [fires] that were directly managed and got out of the site.

**

Well, I understand that the Park has to go through a whole bunch of decisions prior to lighting off the fire. They go through checking the fire manual, checking with the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control, checking on the wind factor, checking on the humidity factors, checking on how dry the area is that they’re going to go ahead and do the prescriptive burn on – there’s a whole combination. All has to come together (wind directions, the whole works), prior to them lighting the fire.

One of the things that you need to understand from all these investigations, is that the best month they have for these prescriptive burns are the months of July, August, September, and October – the reasoning being because a lot of the factors they have to look at (humidity, moonrise, or whatever it is) do come within that four month period – which makes it the best time for them to burn.

We’ve always said, “well, why can’t you burn during the winter?” Well, during the winter it’s a whole different atmosphere – a whole different set of factors that they have to look at.

**

That I would have to say I know very little about. I know that they do controlled burns all the time. I do not know anything about their decision-making process...I appreciate any information they want to share. I have no reason to think that there would be any input they would need from any of us. I’m by no means an expert in that field. So, to know more about how they go about making those decisions, of course!

**

I don't really know. I know we talk to Yosemite, and they pass it to somebody.

**

Q-4 Impact of Media Releases. If you heard about a smoke event through the media (for example, via media release): what information would influence your decision to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away? Please elaborate.

People hear the media, and they only hear "fire." And they hear "smoke." And they don't hear "oh, it's a control burn in a little area." So, when you're dealing with the media, in my opinion – which is what I do in marketing – it's better to not have to say it! Stop it in August! Stop it during the major holidays! But if you have to do it, put a Smokey the Bear spin on it. You know, "there's a little prescribed burn. Come take an interpretation thing in the Park." Make it something fun in learning, instead of just a blanket "we have a prescribed burn and there's smoke."

The Park is really good at communicating through the Visitor's Bureau. And we have a great network getting it out to all the partners – all the stores and related businesses, the paper, etc.

**

I would have to say that's probably the one area that's for me frustrating. Because the media will always run with it before the Park. So that's where the Park is probably a little bit slower, where they could actually be sending out press releases ahead of time. News always has to be...there's a certain sense of drama that is built behind news, I understand. So why they would want to report that there's going to be a prescribed burn is probably a part of the problem. But they'll always come out with "it looks like there's a fire in Yosemite." And then we spend the rest of the time (the next 24 hours) doing the damage control of saying "it is a prescribed burn; the Park's not on fire; the Park is still open dah dah..." So, that's been a constant frustration...

If the Park sent out press releases to the local medias a few days in advance, letting them know that they're starting the prescribed burns – as they usually let the gateway know. Then it wouldn't be hype when somebody reports smoke and a fire in the Park. The media is not getting this information. And so if they got it ahead of time, it takes all the hype out of it. Because then Channel 47 will say "yeah we know; that was a prescribed burn. We already know." And they look for a more newsworthy story to run with.

**

The problem is, and you know as well as I do, that media – whether it be a newspaper, or magazine, or something like that – has a huge impact on the citizens. Okay? The media a lot of times embellishes something that is not – or should have not been embellished – The problem that we have is that if something comes out – embellished, which it does – automatically the second there's a fire around here, we (the Highway 120 corridor, or
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Groveland, or Sonora, or any of these surrounding areas) have a problem, because people have a tendency to believe what they read. The media needs to learn to say “there’s a control burn going on” or “there’s a fire going on” and because they embellish all of this with “it’s going to cause you asthma; you’re not going to be able to breathe; the smoke’s going to be bad...” that’s what causes people to stop going to Yosemite.

With control burns, I would say that the less media impact is best. The reason that I say that is because, when a fire is happening down south and they’re not control burns, everybody sees those because the camera can get to them easily from the L.A. area, and so there’s just a lot of fear that’s associated with that. Even if there’s a press release that goes out that says “there’s a hundred acre control burn in Yosemite along Tuolumne Meadows” the thought of our guests is going to be “do I want to go there? Do I want to put my family in a possible situation there that control burn may get out of control?” We’ve seen the impact in Southern California, and what those evacuations entail. So, if it’s a normal, day to day operation, I think the less media impact the better. Other than if at the end of it, maybe some “here were our goals, here’s what we achieved, and here’s what we anticipate will happen afterwards.” And I think that’s part of the education process they’ve been doing.

The media wants the “out of control” stuff; they don’t want “here was our successful burn, and here’s what we achieved.”

Well, unfortunately, the media tends to blow things out of proportion for the spectacular news of it. What I would do is work to get a second source. But in general, if I was in the Bay Area, where I’m from, and I was looking to the Park and anything about fire popped up, I would probably re-route, because the area’s a known tinderbox – and things can escalate and...also, the already scarce resources of housing, food, parking places becomes even more scarce when you’re competing with CDF and Cal Fire for those resources. So I would probably tend to reschedule. Plus, my wife is very sensitive to smoke, and she would make me do it.

Q-5 Fire and Smoke Management Assessment. When you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?

And smoke probably would be the number three issue, I think. And just to give you a little perspective, they did the – what was it? the control burn that they did last year that got out of control: what was that called? The Big Meadow Fire. That shouldn’t have happened, and that was really a bummer for Labor Day weekend.

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So, when they closed the Pass for Labor Day that inconvenienced a heck of a lot of people. And it did affect my business. And you know, they weren't really good about putting the word out, but I did find out through the gateway group that you could put in a claim for compensation for lost income. Which I did, and which they actually paid. So, it was in the lower four figures, but I justified it – I compared it to previous years, and I thought that was very responsible of them. They took responsibility – and that's what I tell my guys at the store: "I don't care if you make a mess, just clean it up! Don't walk away from it." Because we're all going to make a mess. Don't cry over spilled milk. Just clean it up.

So, they made a mistake, and they acknowledged it, and they took responsibility for it. And I think that's – you know, you don't see the government taking accounting like that very often. And that was very strong on their part, I thought. They gained a lot of credibility. I've got to give them kudos for that.

**

Well, again, I don't pretend to know all there is to know about assessment or the program. Again, I just look at trends – and I don't see any dangerous trends out there. I don't see any repeat offenders. My actual contact with firefighters in varying places – either on the road, in the fire stations, or in guiding traffic – has always been nothing less than professional. When I pull by fire sites I don't see a lot of extra people hanging around for the sake of hanging around. So I would say that the system is managed as well as it can be; it's probably as lean as it can be. But that's all I can observe...

The one that I can relate to that came out of the Park was the last control burn that was last summer. It got away from them up there, and the smoke element – and its impact, obviously, on the tourism, is always a direct relationship: smoke gets in the air, and the tourism drops off. On that particular one, we lost beds (hotel beds) – Europeans that had booked months in advance – we lost those bookings as people realized there was smoke in the area...fire safety...A lot of people just don't like smoke, and don't want to get to their destination and find out how breathable it is. So they may – especially the elderly – they make decisions up front about just changing their plans.

**

The fire last year is what comes to my mind. That's the biggie. Both that and – about two years ago, I was going to Carson City. And I go through Tioga which I love. And this was with my family. And every – it seemed like every ten miles or so, they're going through smoke. And it really hurt the experience. This was my vacation, and not just doing something for work. And prior to that we went before Christmas, and we had gone earlier when Tioga was still open. It was a dry year. And we saw all these piles of stuff everywhere – which also looked bad. And then when they started burning it when I went through the next time, I went "oh, click!"

As far as – I've really noticed during the last four to five years that they're doing a lot of control burning throughout the Park, and mostly during the summer. Which I understand, and I don't, obviously. I'm just somebody who knows you can't burn in the summer. After last year's fire, they did – the Superintendent actually explained it really well their process. And I know they felt really bad (not only the fire damage, but the tourism season was over Labor Day weekend). And that's our livelihood for these gateways: it's the summer season.

You know, I think it's a waste of money to keep surveying and surveying it when you know in August you shouldn't be burning. August is the deepest, darkest, hottest month that you shouldn't be doing things – and maybe into the beginning to middle of September – because we don't get rain here for months and months at a time.

It's our hottest season. It's a no brainer. We know that's the hottest season. Again, I understand they have certain times they can do things; but that's a huge tourism time. And these gateways and Yosemite – you'd think the Park would want to make some money. Because the government needs money the way they're spending it! It's a BIG season, and when people see smoke, they think fire, and of the past, and they don't want to go there.

That's a really tough question, because there is no right or wrong. And what has happened since the Big Meadows Fire, they (Yosemite National Park, the Federal Government, etc.) have done a lot more research and work on when to light a fire, when not to light it, and all of that kind of stuff. The smoke management is something that if there's no direction change in the wind, they're going to be able to manage it. But if in fact there is change in the wind to where the smoke then starts into the canyon, and into Sonora, or whatever: at that point, to me, there should be an ordinance, rule, regulation that can be pointed out for that day. Okay? So that the smoke does not come down and hang in the areas. We get a lot of it here, but Sonora gets a TON more than we do.

[Here in Groveland and Pine Mountain Lake] we sit down in a hole that is a natural valley where Pine Mountain Lake was built by Boise Cascade. And we sit in a hole, and it does come down rather extensively. We have made a policy [here in Groveland and Pine Mountain Lake] that if the fire and smoke is impacting the neighbors, then WE have to put it out. Which is something similar to what I think the National Park ought to do on their control burns.

I have to say that the most recent prescribed burn that they had, they reported to us that they were watching climate charts, winds and all of that sort of thing. And they chose days that would provide the minimal impact, and they succeeded. We did not even know they were having prescribed burns the last time they did them. They're paying better attention to the actual weather reports, I think, is a great asset.

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It's a necessary evil, and the option of – the outcome of not going in is far worse than the impact of doing it. Just thinking of what happened up here when the A-Rock Fire burned in, I think, the early 1990s up here. None of that had burned, and so it was a much different story than it was this time when it burned through there. I think Yellowstone is what changed a lot of ideas regarding fire: it's necessary and needs to happen, and if we can do it in controlled pieces, it's much better for all of us than letting it go, and providing too much fuel – and then getting out of control. And then we end up with an area that's just sticks sticking up.

I think one of the issues that came up out of last year's was the whole timing issue. And, one of the things I think a lot of people haven't been able to wrap their heads around: why was a grass meadow being burned in August (in the hottest, driest time of the year)? And I'm sure in the fire science "world" a lot of that has to do with the ability to make it burn.. If it's too wet, it's not going to burn, and so on and so forth. But I think that's probably – we've gotten a lot of information on why it's necessary to do it, [but] I don't think we've gotten a lot of information on issues like what happened last year when a grassy meadow being burned (as opposed to a forested floor that has lots of trees and shade, and it's not going to be quite as hot).

**

Q-6 Likes and Dislikes of the Effects of the Fire Management Program. Keeping this idea in the foreground for a moment: what elements do you like or not like about fire and smoke management at the park?

I'm probably not versed well enough to answer that question. It seems like it's working. Obviously, last year was a bit of a challenge. But I'm sure we also learned from that, and that's what we will put in place to make sure that we try to not allow it to happen here, or elsewhere.

**

Well, what I like about it now, is that there's a lot of thought going into all the conditions prior to lighting that fire. Okay? They have done a lot of work; they have made a lot of progress moving forward – thinking more about the impact of the fire (or whatever) prior to ever lighting it. Which is great.

What I dislike about the situation still, is that three days before the 4th of July weekend they lit the first control burn up here in Yosemite National Park. It happened to be the Crane Flat burn, and it happened to be on the Big Oak Flat road, which is our tourist entrance to the Valley floor. What we had a problem with, was they did the same thing last year prior to the Labor Day holiday, and that's the big one that got away. Before the Big Meadow Fire, there was not a lot of communication going on. Yes, we knew there

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was going to be a control burn. My understanding is that the day they touched that fire off, everything was approved. Now a few minutes later something went wrong.

When you have millions of people coming up here – and the example was given to us by Don Newburg, that this June alone in this year 549,947 people visited Yosemite National Park. Half a million! Unbelievable! Most of the visitors to Yosemite National Park come from the San Francisco area, which is through our corridor.

So what they need to really start doing, is anticipating – even though ALL the conditions are favorable for the burn; everybody's checked everything; the Tuolumne County Air Pollution Control has said "yes, it's time to burn" – YOU'VE GOT TO NOT BURN PRIOR TO A HOLIDAY! The biggest reason is that you not only impact the visitation to the Park, but you hurt your Yosemite Gateway Partners. Not just the businesses. You hurt a lot of people that depend on that summer tourism to make it through the winter.

Personally, the window I'd prefer is no more than a week prior to a holiday. The reasoning is because we had this year's first control burn – it was excellent, they did an excellent job, the fire went very well, and the smoke went a different direction because of the wind; everything worked great – it was actually out prior to the holiday. The word was out, though, that the burn was there. We went back up there on the 8th of July, and actually drove through smoke, because it was still smoldering.

So, what we would like to see, as far as business people, as far as Chambers of Commerce, is that you just don't light it off before a big holiday. Now, don't get me wrong. During a summer weekend, the traffic through here is unbelievable; but because of the national holiday, and because of the economy's condition, people are actually hunting up this area. And all of our bed and breakfasts, all of our hotels and motels are close to being filled to capacity – especially over the holidays. We don't want that ruined for our guests.

And we're getting cooperation. We're having a lot of conversations with Yosemite National Park., because – when we discovered that they were going to actually light one, we did a horrendous email blitz that actually got the US Forest Service burn stopped right here in Greeley Hill. However, we did not get the National Park to stop theirs. Luckily, it didn't go anyplace.

Let's go back and talk about the media. The media comes up and says, "oh, they're going to have a control burn in Yosemite National Park starting on this date." Well, everybody has already planned their vacation to be there 4th of July or the 4th of July week (or whatever), and because it happened on Labor Day last year, the tourist starts thinking about "let's change our plans."

I just want to say that you need to understand, too, that to maintain our forests like we should be maintaining them (and a lot of times we lack a lot of work in our forests) we do need to control burn. We do have to take care of the undergrowth; we do need to take care of the noxious weed problem that the humans, by the way, have brought into our

National Park. So the control burns are very, very important. They are very important for our timber growing like it should be growing, and our forests growing like they should be growing. The biggest thing I would like to see one of these days is that the Federal Government, the National Park System, the Bureau of Land Management – all of them – start really a maintenance system for their forests. So that the overgrowth doesn't take all the trees, and the smaller trees are not shaded out by the big boys, and are able to grow. We just need to maintain our forests a lot better than what we do now.

Another problem that we have is that our state highway sign down at the bottom of Mocassin. We have a problem when if there is a fire (like the Big Meadows Fire – the control burn last year), the sign at the bottom said “Big Oak Flat Road closed.” Well, that is the name of the road from the gate on to the Valley; the problem is, we have Big Oak Flat right down the street here. So what happened is that when that was on the sign, the tourists were actually stopping at that point, and had no directions (like you could still go to Groveland; you can get up to the lodge; you can still go to Cherry Lake; or you could go through Coulterville, come through Greeley Hill; or you could go through Mariposa and then come on Highway 49, or Oakhurst and then come on Highway 41.

For likes and dislikes I'll reiterate: I don't think you should burn during the summer. But I understand it. So if you're going to do it, make the minimal impact you possibly can.

Lots of smoke when they do too many of them. The smoke is really bad, and it affects our air quality. You know, people come here out of L.A. – a lot of people come from L.A. through out corridor – to get away from the smog and pollution and things. So when they are doing a lot of burning and the wind is pouring our direction (and I imagine it's the same with the other gateways), it affects the aesthetics; it affects breathing for people because we are higher up – those are the complaints that I hear. And also, it gives us bad publicity, because they say “oh, there's smoke up there; is there another fire?” And as soon as the press gets a hold of anything they're like, “you know, Yosemite is closed.” And there goes our tourism!

So on the tourism side, that's pretty much my thoughts. I wish they did not have to do it so much, or so many at a time.

One thing Yosemite does really well is making sure to go out and get people's unbiased opinions from unbiased people. And I think they do that really well. I believe they listen... Communication is very good. Yosemite makes sure to let us know, so we can let our customers know.

As the owner of the Jeffery Hotel in Coulterville for several years, the Telegraph Fire was an especially difficult one for us to get through, because of the amount of rerouting

NPS Scientific Research Study YOSE-00406 – Understanding Stakeholder Perceptions of Fire Ecology and Smoke Management in Yosemite National Park (Final Report – May 31, 2011).

Appendix #5 Business / Chamber of Commerce / Tourism Transcripts

that occurred, and there was a length of time even after the fire was fully extinguished that the air needed to clear and the travel to return; also, the time lag in perception of a fire still being in the area. It took quite a while. Again, that one was closer to Coulterville, but the impact affects everyone around the county.

I can't speak for fire response. I don't know much about the management system out there. I can only tell you that anything that is on fire in the Park definitely has a behavioral effect here in Mariposa – as the whole county.

**

Q-7 Fire's Impact on the Ecosystem. Could you briefly share your understanding of fire's role in the ecosystem in Yosemite NP? How do you feel fire influences the health of the forest within YNP and the surrounding area?

It definitely does. And I have to say this from a personal level: that the property that my husband and I actually bought – we moved up here in 1996, in the fall – the property that we bought was five acres that had a fire come through that July. And they saved the house [but] that whole five acre was just blacked. It was charred. So we actually number one went to a service club that had somebody speaking from the fire department, that explained “this is how Mother Nature basically takes care of nature. There's this whole cleanse and purge that has to go on” and how us moving into environments like this adversely impacts that, because we'll actually prevent fires from occurring on a regular cycle. And that they can actually be more dangerous because of us delaying fire. That when we finally do, there's so much vegetation there that it makes the fires much worse than if Mother Nature did not have us interfere with her.

Having bought that property, we actually got to watch the ecosystem as it rebuilt. Which was fascinating! And of course for us, 1997 was the floods. So, we moved in on December 12th. On December 18th it started raining, and it did not stop. And of course we had nothing left on the soil to stop the run-off...it was just like this giant mudslide for three weeks. And we thought “oh my gosh. What did we get ourselves into?” But then the spring came, and we got to watch everything come back – Manzanita, trees we thought had died...But then even just to watch the whole system. The animals came back first. They brought the next tier. So we got to watch how one pair of population of animals came back because the floods now had the one underneath them; their food source was now replaced. And so we got to watch all that. Also, with the larger animals – the ones that survived – we got to watch the displacement of them. That first summer we had at our elevation black bear coming through our property that we have not seen since. And we're sure that they were displaced from somewhere else, and moving through to find their food site. So, it was fascinating!

**

I absolutely believe that fire is crucial. And man-made fire is a way of keeping it burning. I know it's something you have to do. And it helps the animals; it helps the groves. It helps stop wildfires.

**

It's a yin and a yang, the way I see it. I know that, by God's grace, fire has always started and cleared out – it allowed trees to be re-grown; it allowed animals to repopulate areas, and the natural systems to stay in place. Also being around some big fires that have happened in the Sierras, I've also seen large numbers of deer, raccoon – all kind of ground crawlers – being displaced and having to come down to much lower elevations and try to fight for food down in these areas. I've seen bear, coyote, umpteen four-legged animals all moving towards food and away from smoke.

In terms of how that affects...To me, it's natural. And we just bear witness to a migration that takes place. But we also see the same when winter snows come. We see the deer come out of the high hills. We know hunters go to very specific places and park, and wait (it's all legal) but they just know that, because these are established patterns.

I can't think of anything else.

**

My understanding is that by burning off the fuel on the ground, you do a couple of things: one, you keep the fire from getting too intense – which would completely destroy the forest and burn all the trees. You could have a level where it burns some of the lower stuff, but not all the way to the top (so you keep a more pristine, beautiful forest in the process). And then my understanding is that it helps with the growth of new seedlings. The sequoias, I understand, have to have that fire to actually cause their seedlings to burst and start to grow again...So my understanding is that it's a necessary part of the ecosystem. And that it's either going to happen naturally, or we can do in controlled fashion.

**

Yes, fire definitely influences the health of the forest. I was just talking about this. But yes, it's very important that our forests are maintained – whether it's through fire or forestation or whatever you want to call it – to keep the forest growing like it's supposed to grow. And not let it be overgrown – which a lot of it has, and that is where we have some HUGE major, major forest fires. Because we have gotten away from maintenance of our forests. And a lot of has to do with environmental concerns. They have the upper hand at this particular time, and they just need to be set back a little bit. We need to take care of what resources we have right now. Nobody wants to lose it. Nobody wants to see a fire go through here. The other thing – a good thing that came out of the Big Meadow Fire except for the hardship on the land – is that now we have a defensible space.

The Indians used to burn the forests before our forefathers came; the Indians used to burn the plains. There was a reason for it. It kept the forest alive.

**

Q-8 Health Impacts of Fire Management on Personal Life. During the recent past (say, within the past 12-18 months) have you been personally impacted (e.g., experienced discomfort or respiratory ailment, such as asthma) from smoke generated by naturally occurring and/or prescribed burning fires within Yosemite National Park? If so, when did this occur and how serious was the impact?

Personally, I have not. And I don't feel that a lot of us around here have, because we have not had a Big Meadow Fire that got away. The plume of smoke which came from this latest control burn was HUGE, but luckily the wind kept clearing it away. And so, from smoke-wise, no. Everybody has a problem every spring with pollution as far as the oak trees dropping all their pollen., so that is always an ongoing problem. Smoke really makes that a bigger problem for people who have that type of respiratory problem. We in Pine Mountain Lake actually shut off our ability to burn, and we are no longer allowed to burn, period. When we do burn, we try our best to have a smokeless fire.

**

From a family perspective: our family lives in Mariposa. So, I'm impacted while I'm up here working. Last year there were a couple of control burns that were in the area that did impact me (smoke). So...it didn't cause any problems for me – as far as breathing – but it made me want to stay inside as opposed to eating my lunch outside. Guests are a different story: we have people who either have asthma or emphysema, or whatever breathing-type of disorders. And for them, it really is an impact. A lot of them book a year in advance; a lot of them – especially in the summertime – we can be 40% international. So we've got people who have come from Europe, or Asia, or wherever, from thousands and thousands of miles, and they get here and then they can't stay, because of the impact of the smoke.

The only concerns really that we have for our guests is...the evenings when there are control burns – and particularly in this area – smoke will draw down into the canyon, and kind of hovers in this area. And then in the morning when it starts to warm up, it kind of draws back in [to the Park]. For people that have asthma, it can be a HUGE problem for them. And even in smaller control burns, we've had guests check out early, or just not be able to stay with us because they're around the Park during the day, and come back here in the evening, and then in the evening the smoke starts rolling back in. And then after a night of that, and not being able to breathe, they're saying "I can't stay here. My asthma (or whatever)..." And so they have to get up and check out early, or whatever.

That's probably our major impact here. I'm not sure if there's any way to manage that. It's going to do what it's going to do...

**

A year ago, the fire was out of control. You couldn't breathe even in Oakhurst, California. It was very, very smoky, and it was very uncomfortable. It burned your eyes and burned your lungs – not to where you couldn't ever go outside. We shut our doors to our house, because otherwise our house would be smoky. And luckily, we have no children with asthma.

**

If you put a time line on it, I don't know. Last summer there was a few days...I'm trying to think...there was a fire that was burning – there were two fires at the time – there was one in Yosemite at the south end here, and then there was one on forestry land that was in Fish Camp. And I can tell you that those two fires – happening simultaneously – did adversely impact our air quality. And yes, we had health issues. But neither of them were prescribed burns; they were both lightning strikes. And it was just bad timing on Mother Nature's part. So when it gets that bad, yes we notice. Going back several years to the big Mariposa fire, yes. I mean, how can it not?

**

My wife is very sensitive. A part of our business we own in Coulterville does involve a bar. She has made it very specifically clear to clients that smoking is not tolerated anywhere near the property. We have a very distant area where smokers can go to collect, and she lectures them regularly. But during the times when the land management is either being done naturally or out of control: those are the times when she has to stay indoors.

**

Q-9 Sensitivity to Smoke. (Only asked of interviewees who have been personally affected by smoke) How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?

She [my wife] tends to stay indoors.

**

A few more actual press releases going out to our businesses, letting them know to share the information. To share that the air quality was unhealthy. If they friends or family or loved ones that were needing to get out and run errands, perhaps letting them know – helping and pitching in, offering to run errands for them so they wouldn't be in the condition of having to endure the poor air quality. But that's the last time I really remember of being impacted, is when we had the Fish Camp and Yosemite fires happening at the same time.

**

N/A

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Q-10 Your Vision of the Future & Proposed Actions. As you reflect upon your responses to Q-5 through Q-9: do you have any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies, related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.

So, our biggest issues here in Lee Vining – at least the merchants – is Tioga Pass. Getting that puppy open – after the long winter. As a snow science professional, I understand their issues up there pretty well, and I think they've come a long way in expediting the opening as best they can. Unfortunately an employee was killed a bunch of years ago, and it ain't worth killing anybody over, for sure! So, that shouldn't have happened, and it should never happen again. And this year, we had some challenges getting the Pass open, with a lot of snow in the spring; a lot of cold temperatures, and – I thought they did a great job getting it open. They really made an effort to get it open for Memorial Day, and we almost made it. Just some weather came in that week before, which prevented it. But boy, they put out a great effort. I have to commend those guys for the job that they do. Because they understand the importance; they want to get it open. And they've worked hard. We were about a week late (a week after Memorial Day this year). And you know, this is fine. I was fine here. Memorial Day weekend unfortunately was off a little bit. But we recovered in June, and so...it was fine over here.

A minor corollary to that is they allow bicycle riders like us to go into the Park about a week before they open it, when it's plowed and it's kind of drying out a little bit. Unfortunately, some of the locals are abusing it a little bit, and I'm trying to work with the bike club to get people to stop where they're supposed to stop. But – that's just a great event that they are fostering. They cut it off a couple of years, a couple of times, but now it looks like it's here to stay, hopefully. That's a wonderful recreational event for locals and ski visitors. It's great to get into the Park and see it without vehicles – which is the only time I will ride in there; it's too dangerous the rest of the time. But, to see Tuolumne in three feet of snow is fabulous! It's really special.

So that's our main issue here. I would say that they do a great job of reaching out to us, and keeping us informed.

**

If I'm the manager: first of all, I don't burn in August. I know better than that – no matter who in calculating numbers tells me it's ok. Which I'm sure they're good at. But I just don't do that. I don't burn on major holidays. I'd make sure to make press releases fun and directed to the areas where the tourism comes from. And maybe make it

more educational. Maybe give...I don't know if they do this...but make their outreach or something in different areas where they show the effects on how you should burn. You know, partner with the other National Parks and do a documentary or something on how you should burn, and why you should burn. And how it helps our animals, and it helps our forests, and it makes for more trees, and it keeps more trees.

And maybe people would get it, and maybe they wouldn't. But maybe...get a little information sheet, a coloring sheet, on Smokey Bear. Use Smokey! Everybody knows Smokey Bear. Make it fun. And that may help people to travel.

Again, what they've been doing is probably the most scientific it can be, given the instruments...and limitations on access. The cost-benefit analysis for doing burns. I would be the last one to think about anything other than it may just – again back to the website. If the public knew that smoke could be expected in an area for some duration, that might help people understand...even at the first site, you don't need to go to the phone and start picking it up all the time. And that some smoke presence – and again, keeping the public educated on the greater good of control burns, and the benefits. So again, back to education.

I don't have a fire science degree, so I don't know...but if there was a way to – in some way – to mitigate the smoke coming down in here. I don't know if that's a “time of the year” issue or...my understanding is that during the day (and you can tell here) as it starts to heat up, the air flow goes into the Park; and at night, it comes out. So...maybe it's trying to do smaller burns at a time, so there's not quite as much smoke – but...I've come to work when there are control burns going on, and it's just a haze over the lodge here. In July and August, when you combine the heat with the smoke, then it's ripe for some people who have issues with breathing, or asthma, or whatever.

Once [the control burns] get down to the smoldering, that's not too bad. And, a little bit of smoke isn't a big issue. It's just whenever it starts to hover, and starts getting thick, that it becomes an issue.

I think if there was a way to...burn it in a manner that would not cause as much smoke to come down into this area. I know that the guys who are out there choosing the areas have some understanding of where the smoke's going to flow. They probably have a really good understanding, because they let us know! “You're going to be impacted.” And we want them to know that kind of thing, because that determines how the fire burns.

If there was a way to – as I said earlier – smaller chunks or a way just to try and mitigate some of that smoke issue.

It hasn't been bad this year. Last year it was – even prior to the Foresta burn. There were a couple of burns that impacted us quite a bit, here.

It would be helpful to us to have a little bit of smoke as opposed to a whole lot of smoke.

**

*I know they're working really good right now. I know they're working really hard. And I believe now they are making a conscious effort to consider what we make suggestions on, or whatever. It's not being thrown out the door anymore. It's actually being brought in. Because it is becoming a...because of the living conditions, or whatever of the existing citizens in these areas, it is becoming a **BIG THING** to them. They are voicing a lot more. So at least Yosemite National Park is doing something about it. We are being listened to at this particular point in time.*

Now, in the future we still need to maintain our forests growing; we still need to have these control burns. But how we handle it – and I'm going to go back to my earlier conversation – was we just have to think about the impact that it will have on the fewest people. In other words: don't light before a holiday or whatever; try not to burn during the summer months (and I know that's the best time to burn). That's what they need to start thinking of in the future. We down here try to burn during the winter months, and we try our best to keep our piles covered and keep them as dry as possible. Maybe that's something that the National Park could think about: trying to keep that covered, and burn it during the winter season.

Also – what I would like to see eventually coordinated is: if that sign (which is an electronic sign, and is controlled by the State of California Department of Highways) comes on again, and makes that statement, that there is a ranger or Cal Fire or somebody there saying, “oh no, that's the road inside the Park.”

**

Q-11 Specific Actions. What specific actions would you like to see to move the Fire Management Program from where it is now to where you would like it to be in the future? What role do you see the Fire Management Program playing in such actions? Please be as specific as possible.

As far as the professional side, I understand that you cannot burn in the snow. I would think you could burn a little more in the spring and late fall season, but still – once you get it going, you've got to do what you have to do. I don't know – and this is my personal opinion – I don't know how scientists can say in August, in the middle of the forest, that the wind is right, the air is right, this is right, that is right, and all the conditions and whatever they use for prescribed burns is right. If you're in the middle of August -- but I know it's an exact calculation, which in human terms sometimes doesn't work, obviously. So I would hope that last year's lesson – I know that they did a lot of studies, and I

imagine they spent a lot of money doing those studies – and I don't know if this is part of those studies.

I would definitely recommend not having prescribed burns prior to the summer holidays. We have more chance of fire through Memorial Day and after Labor Day. If it could rain a little to get rid of some of that, and clear up our air. You know you can't buy our air. People come from all over the world for our scenery. And you can't see that when they're doing prescribed burning.

Not knowing anything about it, but I would think that maybe you burn a little here and a little there instead of trying to wipe it out in your window you have. I know you have to clear the forest. I understand that part. And that's important in why we should all burn. So I know that they're trying to do is for the good of everything. But maybe, again, not knowing anything about fire, maybe we do littler spots.

Listening to the citizens. Listening to the people that it's going to affect. Using that information (from listening to them), and combine that into the fire management. John F. Kennedy said it the best, "you can please some of the people some of the people some of the time, but you cannot please all the people all the time." That's a consideration that we all know – that fire management's going to have to take. But if you listen and try your best to implement into your fire management program the concerns of the outside (outside the National Park)

[Through the Park Service's recent workshops and emails] they're letting us know, and we're getting communication from all over the inside of the Park, which is really good. You don't do this overnight. But you start this process. You build relationships with the people in the process, and you get the average citizen to be more relaxed. You know the worst fear that any citizen has is when the Federal Government is doing something. Because the Federal Government's answer to everything is "no, no, no." The wild and scenic river program that we're working on right now, with space of ¼ mile on each side of the river where the wild and scenic rules and regulations are going to be put in, the first thing that the citizen thinks is, "I can't go wade in that river anymore." So, you have to get them to not just talk facts, but also where the implications might be. And that is where these workshops have helped.

I know that in the burn last year, they found a way to provide public education. The Park was extremely forthright in making sure I understood – and as many people as they could – how the decisions are made to decide to do a burn, and the amount of excruciating studies that are done to make sure that it does stay controlled, and that secondary places are found out. Again, I don't know enough about this system to be able to really wield direction.

**

Another issue we've got going is that they want to house some of their staff out here in the Lee Vining canyon at some of the Forest Service compound. And they're trying to cooperate with the campgrounds down in the Lee Vining canyon, as they've got some issues at the Tuolumne campground and the housing for all their employees up there, that they've got to address. And they're looking towards us down here to help address some of those. And I think that's great. And we've had conversations about that in the past. And that's kind of ongoing. So I see that as the second biggest issue.

Let me just back up by saying that: things like that when that closes, or the Pass opens with the snow – getting it plowed – I don't think the Park has a responsibility to us as business people. I think the Park's primary responsibility is to people, so people can get through. Late in the season when my dad wants to come over for Thanksgiving, if the road's open to San Francisco, then it's a lot easier for him to get here. If it's not open, he has to go around and he might not come. But – you think of a lot of people like that. People come from all over the world to visit here, and not only would they like to get over Tioga for convenience, but I'd like to get them up on Tioga just to see it, since it's so spectacular up there.

So, it's really a service issue to me. It's not a commerce issue. Because we'll be fine. I can adjust to whatever happens with the Park. I can make adjustments here. It's really a public service issue.

It would be nice if they could expand the hours of the shuttle bus for hikers, and doing a late dusk run for the late stragglers who get lost – like me!

Also – Yosemite participates in the annual Mule Days event (over Memorial Day weekend) in Bishop. This year they didn't come over Tioga Pass (still closed) but instead went around. I realize it might appear hypocritical for the Park to come over the Pass when it was still closed, but they wouldn't have to tell anybody (Park staff were already going back and forth).

**

Q-12 Inaction. What would be your concerns if what you proposed is not acted upon?

If it continues in a way that it did last year – because this year we really haven't had any smoke issues – we would deal with it, and work through it. Just knowing that it's part of what's happening. As long as we knew that was the way that it had to be. If we discovered that “hey, there's a way of making it so it doesn't impact our guests” and it's a viable option, then it would be a different story.

**

The adverse reaction is that if media gets a hold of a fire, and they hype it up to such a degree, the impact is that you get people cancelling vacations. And of course that's the negative economic impact on our businesses. When you've got somebody that's planning on coming up from Southern California, and they hear the air quality's horrible, and that the fire is only 20% contained – Yosemite's huge! So it could be that it doesn't affect our air quality at all; or it is only our area and not Mariposa, and not Mammoth. But it sends out those alarms where then everybody starts calling. And what was happening with the Mariposa fire a few years ago was people were doing just that; they were calling and cancelling. The rock slide (not that was fire) was the same thing: people thought they couldn't get into the Park. They were calling and cancelling vacations. And it's like "of course you can!" Years ago when Triple A got a hold of the Merced River Plan Study, and came out with the statement that Yosemite was going to stop vehicles coming into the Park. This was years ago! We still have people calling and saying "now, I understand I can't drive my vehicle into the Park." Of course you can! But those are the sort of things that have long-standing adverse effects, because it doesn't affect a European vacationer, because they don't hear that. They plan a lifetime vacation in coming over and seeing National Parks. But that day-tripper, that weekend person, they're the ones that are more likely to [turn] on the 11 o'clock news in L.A. and call up the next day and say, "well, I'm going to cancel my stay."

**

The concern would be once again, and I'll use myself as an example, the Chamber of Commerce list. My membership is my main concern. We as a Chamber of Commerce want to help every one of our business people be successful. If it's not listened to – if our suggestions are not listened to – if they don't start thinking about those who make a living off of tourism, they're going to have a lot more disgruntled people. The hardest thing to do is to rethink – to get out of the box and start rethinking. If they don't listen (and take the attitude that "I'm the Federal Government, and I'm going to do it"), then I will be very upset. At this time however, the group that we have up there is just fabulous.

**

I think we go another ten years before we get another devastating fire. And that's inevitable. The wind is going to blow a different direction where the calculations don't work. I know this past one was explained really well to us. The calculations didn't include it being burnt already (that was part of the Foresta fire ten or twelve years ago). So they still had timber that had been burned, and that was ignited.

**

Q-13 Personal Commitment and Responsibility. How do you see yourself personally involved in bringing about your suggested changes?

I've made the commitment to attend these meetings, as the Chamber of Commerce president, but also as a commissioner of the southern county. By my attending these, I show the National Park that we, Tuolumne County, are concerned about these things.

We're just starting to get a plan of attack. There have been workshops before, but they haven't been based upon specifics like fire management, or input on fire management, or whatever.

We now have a Tuolumne County that is working very closely together. We have some Chambers and our Supervisors focused on the survival of Tuolumne County. Our district Supervisor has $\frac{3}{4}$ of the National Park in his district, because Tuolumne County is a HUGE section of Yosemite National Park. So they are really working with us. They are asking us questions about where do we go. I have had all of the Supervisors, I've had all of the planning committee on transportation at these meetings with the Park Service. That's what we have to do.

Well, one of the "luxuries" that we have here is that we are privy to first line of information for anybody coming out of the Park that wants to deliver any negative experiences that they had within the Park. If the visitors want to vent, they come in here. We actually – when we do get complaints it's more about services outside the Park (service providers) than it is within the Park. We have a very low number – and I can count them on one hand – whenever anybody needs to complain about the operations at the National Park. When they do complain, once in a while to staff but occasionally it's more about public access to parking, and the issues that come with heavily populated days.

We will continue to attend the quarterly meetings, and speak up when we need to. And speak up when we don't need to! We're involved with a lot of this. We will continue Yosemite Park as a part of our board of directors for our Visitor's Bureau. I will continue to inform my guests. And I'll follow this issue a little more.

I think...if we saw issues that we thought needed to be addressed among fire crews in the Park – either through Gary, who is an information person for us – I think there are ways for us to be able to communicate with them effectively, and either get the answers that we would need, or provide suggestions, or whatever. They have a job to do, and they're tasked with that. If we needed to discuss something with them, I feel comfortable being able to do that with them.

That's one of the reasons that we participate in the Gateway Partners: because it has become the very open sort of channel of communication for all of us. We get information relayed to us from the Park which is very important for us in dealing with visitors on our end, and then vice versa. So, the Gateway Partners has been a good vehicle for all of us. I hope Yosemite (the Park Service) feels the same way. Because just the access to the information. And knowing that it's there. Because, again, there's nothing worse from a Chamber's perspective to have something going on up there that either positively or negatively can affect our businesses and not be able to share it with them. And that's our role: to keep our members informed, so that we can make the best of whatever situation. Just knowing that the Park is full, and that they consider their season seven months long, and that they run pretty much to capacity seven months. And a few years ago I can tell you we were thinking of our season as being three months long! Why is theirs seven and ours three? We need to think about this! And so having the Gateway Partners can be of benefit to us. And also then to know "well if they're full, that means that we have to do a better job outreaching and working with them so that they know we're not. That we can handle their overflows." And so that's a good thing for our businesses to know, because then they know they have to start concentrating on the shoulder season. Because we can work with the Park, and that can be a definite benefit, economically, to those businesses.

**

Q-14 Interest in Public Participation. Would you be interested in participating in facilitated dialogues with Fire Management Program staff and other interested people concerning fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding area? If so, do you have any suggestions regarding how you would like such dialogues to be organized and facilitated?

If the fire management program ever felt the need to have more of an outreach, then absolutely! Absolutely!

**

I think the quarterly meetings of the Gateway Partners is the forum.

**

The answer is definitely WE WANT TO BE INVOLVED. We want to be a part. Not to be a stumbling block to fire management, but just to help them make different decisions, or implement some of our ideas into their program. It is working good right now, because of our involvement, because of our email blitzes to the Park. So I just don't want the Park to satisfy me that you're going to be part of it or whatever, and then a year from now drop it. Whether I'm the president or commissioner is not the issue. From this point on, continued communication.

However you put this into the program (through by-laws or whatever it is), there's got to be statements in there that they commit to continue with their program informing

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Appendix #5 Business / Chamber of Commerce / Tourism Transcripts

everybody. Right now, the emails I get from all of the Park personnel and directors, rangers, etc. is working very well. I think, because of what has happened especially with the Big Meadow Fire. I believe they now understand also that they have got to have this commitment. Now, we're not just talking about fire management. We're a big part of the wild and scenic management plan, a big part now of the transportation situation because we have committed to more than just one item.

**

I don't know if there's more information, but the information we collect at Gateway we work to disseminate here. Again, the work with the Visitor's Center – if we had comprehensive websites that we could direct even our motoring population to. You know, the GPS world is getting much more sophisticated. And what tends to happen, in the search world, anybody with an internet-based telephone would be able to search these websites. And if we were able to refer them to that “for more information, go here” that would certainly be a requested and useful service for the more technically sophisticated traveler. And we're seeing more of that on a daily basis.

Again, things can happen in the National Park that are safety related that, if they are put up in a certain type of web background, the GPSs and the search web sites will track them and disseminate that information. So, we get – an example of this happens...the Park doesn't do this (it's not Park related) but it has to do with hospitality. We at the Hotel Jeffery have a reservation rooming service that books our rooms. (You can go on-line and book your rooms). Consequently, in that web service, as we get closer to the actual date and certain rooms are un-booked, the prices start to drop down on those rooms automatically in the reservation booking computer. Now, other hospitality web-based companies track – Expedia for one – tracks our room prices (as do many others), and once that room price drops below a certain level, it automatically sends emails out to people that are looking for that 40% and 50% discount. And that happens all automatically over the web system. And so another way to expand on that: if we had some kind of fire management issue (smoke, or fire, or even a road condition) if that information was published in a certain profile, and tracking services could track it, a guy like me if I'm driving down the road – I could actually put in a request for anything Yosemite traffic-related in the next 50 hours (because I'm driving to the area) and that information would drop into my IPOD or whatever else I was using. And that connection would get information out to the public faster. Much faster.

Another one might be the use of the cables on Half Dome, which are now on a permitting system on the weekend. But also during the week days, during traveling –anytime they're backed up a little bit. I don't know...that information might be out there.

But also, again, back to certain roads that have fire managers on them. For whatever reason, that information getting out to the public could be useful.

So, it's the general consensus here that if the Park could have the ability to do more to get clearer information out faster, it would certainly be digested faster by the driving public.

**

I think it might be a good thing once a year, to have a public meeting where the fire crew said "here's our plan for the summer, here's where we're going to do our control burns, here's where we think those are going to happen, and here's what we think the impacts are going to be. And if anybody has any questions they can do that." I don't think this is happening right now. When stuff does happen, I know that Gary is sending out information that's really helpful.

**

Q-15 Interest in Personal Dialogue with Fire Management Program Personnel.

Would you be interested in having someone from the Fire Management Program contact you to discuss your concerns and ideas?

If I had the access information, I would probably tend to use it from time to time. And again, in my job with the Chamber, I represent upwards of 400 businesses in town, and interact with the visitor traffic (the traveling public), it would certainly be one network that I would probably use more than some others. So, yes.

**

I don't feel a need for that, necessarily. If they wanted a dialogue, I would be open to that.

**

Definitely! Concerns and ideas change all the time. The next Chamber of Commerce president might have a totally different point of view, or totally different ideas, or totally different personality. So yes, definitely.

**

Not really. I like hearing it from Yosemite, and I trust their information.

**

No. Like I said, I'm pretty pleased with what they do.

**

Q-16 Receiving more information. Would you be interested in receiving more detailed information describing the Park's current guidelines governing decision-making? If you are interested, please note that only your name and telephone number (and not your responses to these questions) will be provided to Fire Management Program personnel.

I get it already.

**

Yes. Any information that has to do with fire management, because they're working on their overall program too. I don't know if it's going to be anything in writing, or CCNRs, or by-laws, or how they're going to handle it. I do know that I have received information regarding the new plan of attack before we light a fire. That will probably change also. Just like we have a new Superintendent up there now, Don Newburg. We may get a new head Ranger. We may get this or that. So that if they bring input, we would like to have it.

**

That gets back to an education thing. You don't know what you don't know! So, my initial response: "no." But of course then if they came out feeling that sharing more information would be better for all of us, then absolutely.

**

I think right now they're doing a good job with that. The attachments they send are pretty detailed. So, I don't see a need for any additional information. I mean it's enough for me to consume and know what's going on.

**

If it was put on a website that, again, that I could peruse, and also forward information to other people. That's really how I – I tend to stay out of the paper business. (I'm trying to save a tree here). In these modern days, the more that we forward in terms of documents, the better off we are, and the more expedient we are.

**

Q-17 If **\$10 million dollars** were to become available for use within the Yosemite region and you were the person able to decide just how those funds would be used, how would you spend them? While your priority might focus exclusively on Yosemite's fire management program, please don't feel limited in your response.

But anyway, \$10 million dollars -- what would they do? I have no idea! I want to keep – Badger Pass is important. You know I learned to ski at Badger Pass as a little kid, and I'm afraid that's going to go away. I learned to ski from Nick Fiore, so I'd hate to see Badger Pass go away. It's a nice little family ski area. And I know that's not real consistent with Park goals and aspirations.

And so, you know -- \$10 million bucks? I don't know. They do an awful lot of law enforcement on the road. There's a lot of rangers out there. So it seems to me that they're pretty well staffed. I don't know!

I've been on a lot of great trails down there. The trails are in great shape that I've been on...I don't know...

I am going to answer that. Back in the mid to late 1970s, they had a program where the gateways actually used to put together a magazine and a television program. And there was a woman – Marie Lane – she actually now has moved out the area, and living with her daughter. She actually started this years and years and years ago. And I actually have the videos of the television programs. But one of the things is the publication they used to actually print it out – it was about all the activities in the gateways, and the Yosemite National Park service actually handed it out to people exiting the gates. So that they would actually be sharing information about what's going on outside the Park.

If they had the money and the resources, I would like to see them bring that program back! Because again, they want us to start the Yosemite experience in the gateways. And the way it was explained to me is that when somebody hits one of the gateway communities, that they're already feeling “this is it! I'm on vacation!” That Yosemite extends itself outside the Park borders. So to be able to do that, then we have to promote what goes on outside the borders. Which is what the Gateway Partners is about, but, we can't promote ourselves within the borders of Yosemite, since the National Park Service doesn't allow that. So it's kind of like: if they had \$10 million dollars to do anything with, then that's what I would like to see them do. Actually start promoting the gateways inside the Park as well.

I don't have any of their publications, but I have the footage from the television program. And Marie Lane is still alive. She was the driving force behind it. I don't know how they funded it, or how they did it all those years ago. But she was the one that told me about the publication, and then gave me all of the – I think they're actually on 8 millimeter – footage from the television program. It was a weekly thing back then. The television stations in the Valley were always looking for material, and so they put this program together and she would go around and she would film it. And they'd have interviews. It was all around the west side of Yosemite.

The things that I respect the Park for doing, is making efforts these days to shift non-essential jobs out of the Park (move them down here). I understand the data processing center may do this. There's more of that...If more services for the Park that could be moved out of the Park, it would tend to lower the competition for the visitor for the things he wanted to do there. If that could be a continued trend. And obviously: educating through an interactive base outside the Park (down here, for instance) that could provide a wider education for people traveling to the Park even in the off-season. They would be able to come through and learn about the Park, and be able to have access and understand what the terms are up there in getting around. And educating that this is not just a "sometime" event. The Park is a four season Park, and it should be seen in all its seasons. And that would help our Mariposa area, but it also helps widen the experience opportunities for the traveling public to encourage that. It might even involve helping travelers get into the Park during inclement weather, because there's still so much to see. However, the traffic road conditions tend to curtail some of the operations over there.

I would also say that if they could make Badger Pass bigger (that skiing resort), that would be a kind of experience that would lead to more visitors to the Park for sports opportunities that can happen when people go there.

The only other thing that I would probably add is that if the Park had a way to – they send Rangers down here from time to time – either react or post them in our visitor's stations from time to time, I think some kind of extended reach-out like that...It's good for our employees; it's good for the visitors to see the Ranger system all the way down into the township down here. If such a thing could be proved meaningful for the educational aspects that we see here...

I'm trying to think of good options and opportunities. One of the things that keeps popping into my head and I think would be a worthy investment for the Park: they're looking at purchasing some land in Mariposa and building a visitor's experience – and also moving some of the Park Service personnel out of the Park and out of El Portal and into Mariposa. So instead of driving all the way from Mariposa five days a week, you may drive one day a week, and the rest of the time you spend in your office (which is where you spend the majority of your time) instead of going to the Park. I would really like to see that developed. I think it would be good for the community; I think it would be good for the Park (it reduces the carbon impact of those employees having to drive). The majority of them live in Mariposa, anyway, or Midpines. So it cuts their commute in the wintertime when the weather's bad. There are a lot of advantages to that.

That's one of the projects that I would like to see. Yosemite Conservancy is actually kind of – they actually were able to purchase a piece of land that was originally donated to build the mining and mineral museum; they purchased that land. There is now a bill in place through Congress to allow the Park Service to actually purchase I think up to 18 acres which would be right in the same area. It would be right next to the area that the Conservancy purchased. And the idea is that: to build a visitor's center there so people

coming into Mariposa could stop there, ask questions, they could pick up their map, they could pick up their pass so they're not clogging the entrance. They could get information. It could be staffed by people who are living in Mariposa who are now driving all the way up there. There's thousands of pieces of artifacts that are in storage in Yosemite now because there is no place to put them out. Those could be put on display there.

Just...moving some of the non-essential personnel capacity in the Park out, and reduce their commute. It helps the town. Less traffic on this road in the summertime and in the wintertime.

I've been here for fifteen years, and it's something they've been talking about for 15 years plus! But now I think is a really good time; if the money were available, it could be done. That could be great for the community. I think it would be great for the visitors. It would be great for the employees. It makes recruiting for the Park Service a little bit easier. (Some people absolutely love living in the Park; but it takes a special person to be able to live in that kind of environment – not be able to go to the Starbucks or go to the grocery store or to the mall or whatever).

Q-18 Additional Comments. Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you'd like to add?

Well, we've covered an awful lot. The biggest commitment that they have to fire management, is that the National Park and the US Forest Service, and the Bureau of Land Management need to take into consideration the surrounding areas, the gateway partners, the towns that depend on that traffic to go to the Park. And of course it comes right back to not burn on a holiday or prior to a holiday. If you try to burn, keep it as small as possible so that you can have it out.

And the problem is, too, is that the second the Park decided that they were going to light another fire prior to a holiday, you should have seen the newspapers! They were making the most – they are going to do a stupid mistake again like they did before. And that's what the citizen reads. They don't understand that Yosemite National Park's burn management team / fire management team checked everything. This time we probably had I believe well over 100 personnel surrounding that burn area. So they took a lot of other steps to hopefully not have that thing escape. But that isn't what the citizen read because of the media.

I've said everything that I would say to the new Superintendent myself. They have been AMAZING to work with. And I have not had the chance to meet the new Superintendent. But I talk to Donna Sisson all the time. We dialogue a lot.

**

The only other thing I was thinking about...in relation to when the control burns get out of control...and not just fires – it could be floods or whatever kind of major issue is going on – the past couple of years we’ve had power issues with PG&E. Last year we were pretty good. I think it was the year before when they had that fire in Mariposa [Telegraph Fire]. We lost power here for quite a while. Last year the evacuation was a problem for us, because we got evacuated not really knowing when we were going to be able to open up – even though the Battalion Chief pretty much knew we were going to be able to open up, but not really wanting to let everybody know that [because] they wanted a controlled message. For us the problem was we had three buses that we coming in. We had guests that were calling us, saying “are you going to be open?” We pretty much knew that by 6:00 pm we were going to get to open, but we were told that we weren’t going to know that until then. And when you have three buses, they either have to find lodging somewhere else – and they can’t really wait until 6:00 pm – so for us, that was a real issue.

The other issue for us is when we do have power issues. And being able to get some sort of communication as to what is expected. Because we have guests coming in saying “are we going to have power?” And we’re saying “I don’t know; I think so, we may...” Just being able to get a really good educated guess on what’s going to happen, so we can relay that information. In the Telegraph Fire, we were able to communicate with a guy that is now retired (he retired this year, and I can’t remember his name). And he was pretty good about being able to give us updates. But on the same hand, you don’t want to bug him, because he’s got all that he’s dealing with. And you don’t want to take away from his time. And the information that he’s giving is second and third hand, anyway...

So, being able to get better – you know, what the fire crew did for us have been great. But the other stuff – like power, or road closures, or stuff like that – that kind of communication is more difficult for us.

We had loss of business insurance, and we were able to recover some. But the interesting thing was: as far as I know, pretty much all the loss of business insurance only covers after 72 hours of electrical. We were evacuated for over 72 hours – about 76 hours. But the problem is: the people we were not able to have here (all the people that we lost). That revenue we lost for three nights. And it was in our busiest time of the year. So we lost all of that revenue. What we were able to recover was the impact after the 72 hours. So with Tioga road being closed because of the fire, we had cancellations from people who were vacationing in Mammoth and Lee Vining and then coming across. Because of the smoke we had cancellations. We were able to recover some of that. But it wasn’t during that three day evacuation process (which was our major hit), it was what we were able to substantiate as a loss beyond the 72 hours. And I understand there is a tort process where you can go and say “because of your actions this is our loss.” I know our insurance company has filed a claim, but I don’t know where that is.

**

NPS Study Responses – Town Planning Councils & Residents

Q-1 Relationship to Yosemite National Park. I'd like to begin by asking you to describe your "connection" to Yosemite National Park (and the Fire Management Program, if possible)

My background is that I'm a retired metallurgical engineer, so I don't have anything in formal training remotely related to fire management or pollution; but I did spend my last five working years with the County of Tuolumne as a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS). So I've had some exposure to air pollution and such, but not much.

My only connection, really, to Yosemite Park is I absolutely love it to death. I'm a card carrying member of the Golden Age Passport...My biggest regret is that even though I can practically see Yosemite out my back door (it's only 20 miles away), it takes me two hours to drive there – it really does – to get to the Valley or to get halfway up Tioga road or whatever. I love it. I have probably hundreds of photographs of it. I guess you could say I'm a serious amateur. I love Yosemite. And I was pretty distressed about the 90 acre prescribed burn last year that turned into eight thousand acres. And they still didn't even get the ninety burned that they had intended to burn. Yeah...This is a sore point. I'm sure they've caught flak from everybody at all levels on that. But then...just a few weeks ago (I wish I would have saved the article) our local paper did publish the Yosemite Park Service's answer to how they proposed to avoid such a repeat incident in the future. And I thought, man, this is really lame. It was things like "well, we're going to be more careful...we'll really look closely at the temperature and the humidity and the other conditions..." and there were just things which they should have been doing anyway (and they probably kind of were). There was no real change that I could see in what they were proposing to do that would prevent another runaway fire (which happened last year). I don't know if you've seen the results of it. The heck of it is, it reburned an area that burned about thirteen years ago anyway. So, yeah, that kind of distresses me, because that was really unnecessary. There's no excuse for that.

**

I guess I started my adventures in the environment of Yosemite in the summer of 1936, when I was 5 years old and came to our ranch which was about 13 miles from the Park entrance (which at that time was Carlin). And there was a dirt road going into the Park, and there weren't prescribed burns back then. There were pretty good forest fires. I worked for the Forest Service when I got older in surrounding areas (Stanislaus National Forest). And then in 1975 I established residency here in Fish Camp, on the southern end of Yosemite. So I've been involved as the administrative captain of the Fish Camp Fire Department. My experience has been from fire fighting with the Forest Service (which is still predominantly that way with cold lines, back-fires and retardant bombing) and I agree that we have to thin the underbrush, ladder fuel and the overgrowth that we've allowed in the last hundred years to permeate the forest. We put out fires and not let them control burn.

Smoke is part of the natural ingredient that goes with any burn, including prescribed (a control burn). The Park Service – and the Forest Service – have something in common. The Forest Service has gotten a little bit better about it. I don't agree with the method of the prescribed burns that the NPS uses along the highways (the corridors) of predominantly highways 41 and 120, where they continuously burn from the road up. They'll do this in the Wawona area over and over again, in the same area. Unfortunately when it starts that way and goes up the mountain, within a hundred yards it's hitting 40 and 60 and 80 foot trees. I've discussed this with the Forest Service (and with the fire suppression people with the Park Service). I would rather see them start from the top down, and cordon off the hot areas – kind of like what they did with blister rust control when they cordoned off the area – to reduce heavy flame-up, and yet get rid of the undergrowth and the brush. And one of the greatest benefits that I can think of that has happened from these control burns has been the reduction of forage near the road and visibility for animals: you can see them coming now. Before, they'd come out of the brush fifty feet from your car, and you can't stop when you're going 35 mph. And now you see them and their movement in time to avoid hitting them. And now they're logging those burned mature trees that have been victims of fire, and that's good.

The smoke? It doesn't bother me. I feel a little concern for people who come up in the fall to try to take pictures in the Valley. And they really can't, because the smoke is so thick. But the weather conditions have to be right for prescribed burns. But I think it's necessary to reduce the amount of growth without letting it get out of hand. And that has happened, both with the Forest Service and the Park Service. We need to have a better control over that, but we need to continue to eradicate the growth that we've allowed to take place in the last hundred years. Now there are steps being made to do that – to reduce this horrific forest fire situation that we've had in the last 40-50 years. And I've been on many of them. Some of the larger ones (like 190,000 acres) when there's nothing but desolation left behind. We can't afford that. And something not necessarily part of the Park Service program, but selective logging is a MUST. It's an absolute must! If we don't do that, and then clean up the underbrush and the trimmings...That has been significantly helpful in forest management. I would like to see more of that done. And I'd like to see the Park actually go into a program of selective logging. It opens up more area, it beautifies the area. And we have to maintain 100 feet...whoopee around each one of our homes, but think of some of the park-like settings that can be developed through good forest management practices. Hopefully I'll live long enough to continue to champion that!

I am basically supportive, and I'll put up with the smoke.

My family's been here...my great-great grandfather was one of the white guys after the Indians. And one of his sons was the stagecoach driver. And his grandson was my grandfather, who was also a stagecoach driver. So, our family goes back a long ways.

I remember telling Mike Tollefson one time – we were in a meeting – I said, “you know, some of the people in Wawona (the people who live here) are more passionate about the Park than some of your employees. Because they’ve invested generations of blood, sweat and tears here.” And he said, “you’re right.” And we may look at it from a different point of view, but our love for the area is the same. And whatever you believe has created Yosemite, this is something that needs to be preserved.

So, my history goes back. And my family being here, talking about some of the old times (whether right or wrong) – what the woods looked like, how healthy they were, how different they were. I remember my grandpa telling the story about the last fire in and around Wawona. He got trapped in a crevice of rocks, and let his horse go, and just sat back there and kicked – put his Stetson hat over his face and just kicked the flames to keep from burning him up. When he came back, his arms were burned; his heels were gone off of his boots, but he survived and the horse came back...eventually! And that was the last time it burned up here. So then when we had a fire here a couple of years ago – and it was a forest fire, and the Park Service let it burn – yeah! There’s sixty or seventy years of fuel accumulation there.

I worked as Park Landscape Architect from 1974 to 2006 on park-wide planning, environmental compliance, and site design projects. I occasionally assisted other parks within the NPS Pacific West Region with planning, design, and resource problems. Also, I am chair of the Midpines Planning Advisory Committee, and I am an active member of the Sustainable Forests and Communities Collaborative.

Starting in 1975 I worked for five years with an interdisciplinary team to complete a comprehensive General Management Plan (GMP), Resources Management Plan, and Environmental Impact Statement for Yosemite. A key element of that project was a requirement to involve park visitors in the planning process and evaluate their issues and concerns about the management of the Park resources. Vegetation management and concern about the lack of maintaining the park’s visual resources and scenic resources was a significant issue that surfaced often and factored into each of the five planning alternatives that were evaluated in the General Management Plan’s Environmental Impact Statement. Clearly fire was identified as a key element in managing vegetation and Yosemite’s myriad ecosystems and visual resources.

I had other opportunities to impact NPS fire policy. In the early 1980’s a prescribed fire at Sequoia National Park’s Giant Forest killed a few mature sequoia trees that triggered complaints from conservation organizations. U C Davis Landscape Architecture Professor Kerry Dawson, park resource management staff, and I were asked to evaluate the situation, identify issues, and suggest alternatives. We were concerned that NPS prescribed fire management policies needed to consider the cultural aspects and heritage qualities of certain specimen trees within proposed prescribed fire boundaries and recommended that fire management plans include identifying significant specimen trees within proposed prescribed fire boundaries and either mechanically remove fuels away

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Appendix #9 Town Planning Advisory Council & Local Resident Transcripts

from the base or backfire a distance to protect heritage trees and other specimen trees and/or clusters of significant specimen species.

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Q-2 Sources of Information for Fire Management Activities and Events. What are your preferred sources of information for learning about Fire Management Program activities and events? Why are these sources preferred?

Right now I'm getting information by email of the fires that are going on right now (like the Slope Fire in the Hetch Hetchy Valley area, most of which is in Tuolumne County). And I appreciate that. And it's very good. And once in a while I'll get a map, and I recognize the area. I really appreciate that. I like that a lot.

**

First, the most important source would be from a NPS employee who is qualified to explain the fire management program activities and events to stakeholders at the local and regional level.

Currently private property owners and other residents in gateway communities fail to understand fire management concepts and fail to take any ownership (buy-in) in the fire management problem and solutions. Subsequently, there is an expectation that the Park Service or some other state or federal agency has the sole responsibility for gathering and sharing information. The mission of the Park has to reach out to the public, outside of the Park boundary, externalizing that effort. Information about the Program is primarily been done within the Park, expecting the public to read brochures or hear about it at a Ranger campfire program, or at an interpretive walk, when the Park needs to do a lot more taking that message out to the public.

**

Gary Wuchner. He was hired – I think he's out of Orange County Fire – he's been doing a lot of stuff on the internet. So I'm (with a lot of people in Wawona) on his website. So we get fire updates. Like a couple of control burns. Well, actually I guess they were lightning strikes. About every day I get an update on that. And here at the railroad, Max posts them.

Gary is out of Wawona, and he works for fire. And he is their information officer. And his girlfriend, Jennifer Baker, is the one who puts up the signs. (And those are updated).

And then there's a lady in Wawona – she's our local Town Crier we call her – and she does it by the internet. You send it to her, and she distributes it. So that information gets out to us really, really well.

**

I would use the internet now. Our local paper makes attempts (kind of) at getting information out, but it's kind of spotty, and sometimes it's not terribly professional. So I would prefer to deal with the internet...I'm not sure that I'm even tapped in, in the right fashion, to what all I might be able to get to see. And so I would love to have more information in that regard, so that I could self-educate myself on that. Because I would, if I had a better input on that.

**

Q-3 Your Understanding of Fire Management's Decision-Making Process. Could you please briefly describe your understanding of how Fire Management decisions are arrived at within Yosemite National Park?

Several ways . . . one, is what I experience and see as a private citizen living one half hour away from the park in Midpines; two, listening to neighbors complain about the lack of Yosemite fire-related information and three, what I learned from working and living in the Park and serving in the public information office during the August 1990 fires.

More recently, during the 2009 Foresta Fire, we in Midpines experienced a lot of smoke, and subsequently anxiety from the lack of information on details of that fire which was 'on the heels' of the catastrophic 2008 Telegraph Fire. I and dozens of families were evacuated from our homes for nearly two weeks and experienced major anxiety not knowing if our property and residences would be destroyed by fire. Worst, was not knowing where to go or whom to talk to about the details of the fire. I felt the same emotions and concerns with the 2009 Foresta Fire.

A neighbor who owns a residence in Foresta was observing the ignition on the morning of the Foresta fire told me that he was concerned that the NPS had not adequately briefed residents and that they waited too late in the morning to ignite the burn. This suggests to me that there is a need to significantly improve the way park visitors, park residents, and residents of nearby communities learn about prescribed fires and their proposed management strategies.

**

I have no idea. Somewhat of an idea probably would be good. Maybe at least it would help me understand their viewpoints a little better. Because right now, I think I'm rather diametrically opposed to their viewpoints. But maybe not.

I haven't had much interchange with any of the fire management people. I should say several years ago, I did attend a sort of a consortium between I believe the Forest Service and the public, and it was sponsored by (I think) our local Congress person. And that was all well and good. But when we got there it turned out that the forest people made a big lengthy presentation and then they said "ok, now we'll have some questions from the

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public.” But even that was not fair, because they said “we want you to write your questions down and give them to us” – and then they selected which ones they wanted to answer. Although I did have a couple of questions that they did answer (and they weren’t very friendly questions). And so, when it was all over – and remember, this was about ten years ago – so hopefully things have changed since then. But one of the Forest Service females came up to me and she said, “Well you know...” and I have to admit, she was really acting pretty snotty about it, “you know, if you don’t like all this smoke, you can always move.” And if looks could kill, I mean I literally would have killed her ten thousand times over. You know, this is not the solution, lady!

So, anyway...I’m not sure that that attitude has changed, because I haven’t really had any opportunity to meet – either in a group, or one to one or anything with any of those people. I would hope that maybe they’ve become a bit more enlightened since those days. But that was a true story that was not happy.

Unfortunately, the recent fire in the area of Foresta – which was out of control to begin with – and that was unfortunate. All the earmarks, the humidity factor, the moisture factor, the winds and all that – and still it went haywire. So. I don’t know. Well, except I’ll say this: I would NEVER start a fire in the heat of the fire season before winter. You’re asking for a lot of trouble. So I think...I’m sure there was something learned; however, that’s one of the most devastating fires since 1991 (the Complex Fire). What that didn’t burn, this one did. And the devastation is unbelievable. We need not to have repeated again. Somehow, we have to control that kind of devastation.

Q-4 Impact of Media Releases. If you heard about a smoke event through the media (for example, via media release): what information would influence your decision to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away? Please elaborate.

I have personal experience with that from that fire last year. And I can show you the video clip on Channel 4. They interviewed me and my kids while we were sitting down at the store having a soda and a popsicle, and watching the fire and the helicopters come in. Because I think – I’m also a science teacher, and so I like to present information with as much factual basis as possible, and as little emotion as possible (even though I’m a very emotional person), and try to let people really learn the whole situation: learn the facts, learn the real story, and then make their own conclusion. And I think that is the kind of information that comes from the Park. I’m sure the Park leans a little bit in some directions; they have a little spin on it for certain purposes like to reduce panic, or to minimize the situation. Or, to accentuate the risk so that people that are reluctant about evacuating actually say “well maybe I should evacuate. The Park says it could be a big problem.” You know when we evacuated, there were definitely a handful of folks that didn’t leave town. And they had the choice. But once they didn’t evacuate, there were certain rules that they had to follow. Not a lot – a handful of people stayed in town.

So, I tend to think that the newspapers and the general media's take on fires is they want to tell the exciting story. They want to share the risk. They want to talk about the disaster. They want to have a first-hand account of people running with their children under their arms in front of the flames, and barely making it out alive. If I were in that situation I would probably temper it, knowing that it was a Park management fire, which I think has a great value to the Park and the forest and the ecosystem – I would tend to minimize. I wouldn't sensationalize.

But honestly, we were having a great day (it was the first day we got evacuated, and we had to get all our stuff out, and we left) but then the road was still open, so we could come to the store, and shop a little bit. And we hung out for hours swimming and watching the helicopters. And the news reporter came up looking for the dramatic, exciting story and he was sort of amazed that I was a family of three, and I had four or five other kids with me (there was another dad there), and a couple of kids were sort of staying with us, and I took them swimming. And we were kicking back in view of the smoke and fire, with helicopters coming in, having popsicles and going swimming a quarter mile downstream from where they were sucking the water out of the river. And the kids thought it was great. And they thought "wow! this is serious, but it's not scary." And they all know a lot about fire – what a great teaching opportunity! To see those helicopters, and to talk about it, and they had a hundred questions! Because kids are curious. "Why do they do this? Why did they set the fire? What about this? Why don't they just put it all out? How many helicopters do they have? Why don't they just drive up there with a fire hose?" Well, you can't in the wilderness... There were so many great things to teach them about, and kids have great questions, so I thought it was a really nice time.

And the news story was this reporter being very surprised at how relaxed this family could be, given that "just over the hill is the fire." And there were a couple of big – I'll give you the clip so you can look at it if you want to. It's sort of funny. "Not the type of reaction you expect from a father of three, with a raging out of control fire moving just over the hill." And then they cut to a picture of a hill with smoke and flames as if we were really threatened. But we weren't. And I felt very confident and safe.

I feel like the reporting is all over the map. You get balanced reporters, you get reporters that really minimize things, you get reporters that want to sensationalize and have a real life reality tv type of story with risk and danger and flames and people with smoke and soot on their face. That's what they want to emphasize.

I don't access a lot of media. We don't get a newspaper. I get most of my stuff on-line and NPR news. When our fire made national news from our yard, that was interesting, but more "that's great! We're on the news!" But I was checking all the web sites every day anyway. I was going to the Yosemite website, and the interagency data base for the whole western US, and I was looking at our incident. They were a day or two behind on the information. And I got more information from talking with people locally. But still...

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The one that probably bugs me the most is the news media. Here a couple of years ago, we had a fire – it was when it burned some lines coming into Yosemite Valley. (It might have been the Steamboat Fire, or it might have been after that). So there was a fire over there, no power in Yosemite Valley. We didn't have any problems here. And I got calls from people – one lady said "are you Ed Mee the ranger?" and I said "well, it was thirty years ago.") And she says "well, I was going to commit suicide one night, and you saved my life!" I don't remember any of this! "I just read in the paper that there's a fire. Are you ok?" And I said, "how did you get my phone number? That was thirty years ago." And I had relatives from across the United States call to see if I was alright. You know, it's an hour and a half drive from here. And then a couple of days later in the Fresno Bee, there's a cartoon of a guy and his wife sitting there doing a slide presentation. Here's a picture; all you can see is their legs, there's smoke and Half Dome is just barely sticking out of. Saying "here was our great trip to Yosemite." There was none [no smoke] over here. Yeah, if you drove up toward Chinquapin or something, you could see the smoke in some other places (and made a pretty sunset). But...the news media – and me being in law enforcement I realize they're not there to report the news; they're to make money. And if it's not exciting enough, then people don't buy the paper.

So sometimes, I wish there was an alternative to the news. I know the Park Service puts information out, but...to the park visitors. How do you get to them before the point of contact? The point of contact being the entrance station. I don't know how well the radio stations work up here. I've tried to tune them in, but we don't get much.

So, being in law enforcement, it was education and enforcement. You always wanted to do the education first. And so, I think trying to get to as many of the people from the Park Service getting the info out (you know, "this is what's going on") would be better.

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I think I would rely more upon the local information – the Park Service.

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I would like to have information about: when and where the fire started; how large the area is right now; the weather forecast; and information about smoke behavior – is it just hugging the ground or dissipating. With this information I could plan my visit to the park and know when and where to go and what areas to avoid taking house guest.

Reliability of the data is also a factor in deciding to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away. I need detailed information about fires in the park and that need for information is different dependent on me planning a day hike or just a scenic drive with house guests. Summer 2010, during the fire near Hardin Lake (Slope Fire) information I obtained from Fresno TV stations was quite different from information I obtained from neighbors who get their reports from Sacramento TV stations and that information may

or may not be consistent with what the Park actually has written, or has communicated. And so to me, I tend to not trust the local stations, and would want to sort of “trust and verify” the data with either a phone call to the NPS or checking the park’s web.

The Park’s web page is not good and very difficult to navigate, it is not user friendly, and for some reason does not seem timely, it doesn’t seem to be as readily available as other agencies like CalFire. This is something the Park needs to correct.

The Park also provides information about myriad topics via recorded telephone messages. Trying to navigate that system is a nightmare! The information may be there; but it’s very difficult to get.

We did visit the Park one time (I think it was last year) when we did know that there was some smoke in the Park (and I don’t remember why the smoke was there). But at any rate, we knew there was some smoke and we actually went anyway. But...we’re close; it’s not that big a deal. It’s not like we either have to go or don’t have to go. But we had been planning to go. I think we had a reservation somewhere to spend the night. So we thought, “well, it sounds like the smoke level’s not too bad.” As it turned out, we were not glad that we had gone, because it was pretty bad. So I guess if I heard from media of one sort or the other, unless they said “oh, it’s just a tiny, very light, small fire that’s contained, and it’s off in the far northwest corner of the Park – not anywhere close to the Valley, or not anywhere close to Tuolumne Meadows” then I might say “ok, no problem.” But otherwise, I would stay away, and I’d tell everybody else to stay away.

Q-5 Fire and Smoke Management Assessment. When you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?

Pretty much. I don’t know the details of it. Taro Pusina is a friend of mine. He started a program at our school up here. And Dave Uberaga was the Acting Superintendent and he came up one day. And we had all the grade school kids in their yellow nomex suits, and helmets. Taro had given them in a week-long training every day on fire (how they went in and did the preparation, and everything) and then when they did do a prescribed burn in the Valley, the kids were there. And one little kid goes, “I want to be a fire fighter when I grow up.” And this kid was like 8-9 years old! And Dave walked in and he goes “Look! A mini hotshot team!” And that was cool stuff.

I know that with the preparation, they take time – a lot of time – months if not years of looking in the areas to see if there’s any endangered plants or animals in there, and then some of the stuff they do to save those. They’ve done a couple of control burns (prescribed burns) between the Wawona meadow and the road, and I know that’s Great

Gray Owl habitat. And I've been in that area after, walking on the Meadow Road, a year or two later and in one day saw three Great Gray Owls...It was really neat to see that.

And so I know that as far as protecting animals and stuff, they do a pretty good job.

I'm sure there are some people you'll interview that are really upset when there's smoke, and really upset when this happens, and "when you guys burn, we can't burn."

So, I really respect and applaud what the prescribed fire and the fire management office does in the Park. I think they're really successful at it. They've had a little mistake or two over the years, but overall they've done a marvelous job and I think it's really necessary and important for the natural environment and safety as well. As a homeowner, I really am thankful that they play a pretty active role here in our town. The A-Rock Fire in 1990 – that one burned right down pretty much to the edge of town. People had flames right outside their back doors. And ever since then, I feel they've really been – as far as here – they've done a lot of clearances during the early season when all the crew gets on and there's nothing burning yet. They're out brushing, and removing debris, and really protecting the town. So I feel like – last year we had another fire (the Big Meadow Fire), and we did get evacuated. We actually saw flames from this back porch. I came out here with the kids with the video camera, and took pictures of flames, and trees going up right on the ridge up here – which is a few miles, two or three miles away. I felt pretty safe. I felt like we had such a – because it was an escaped prescribed burn, unfortunately, I think there was great pressure on the fire team and the Superintendent to make darn sure that nothing – no one got hurt and no one's house got burned, because it was their fault, you know. And so we had more resources than I had ever seen. We had twenty or thirty fire crews and trucks stationed all over old El Portal here and down by the school in the Rancheria Flat area. So I felt very well protected. And we had more helicopters. They were sucking water right there. So everyone came into our backyard and we all sat, had cold drinks, and a video camera, and it was just helicopters coming right over our house. I could have spun the story for my little kids as "this is scary. Oh my gosh, there's a fire!" Or it could have been "those darn Park Service guys. They lit this fire. It's their fault." But from the kids' perspective I didn't want them to be afraid. I didn't want them to be worried, and I wanted them to know that fighting fires is part of the Park's job, and overall it improves safety. It improves the ecosystem and the health of the forest. And so I viewed it as an educational thing, and we were pretty relaxed.

It was an inconvenience to be evacuated. For five or six days. We were supposed to leave. They were worried that if the conditions were right, or wrong, depending on your perspective, it could sweep down the canyon in a matter of hours. And so they didn't want to have to evacuate people in an emergency situation after dark, and so they took us all out, and people went where they needed to go. There were shelters I think in Mariposa, but most everyone went and stayed with friends. They didn't evacuate the Park Service housing just a mile away; it was just old El Portal. And the school year had

already started, and I'm a teacher. And so we slept on the floor of our friends' house, with another family. Two families stayed with them. So, my kids thought it was great! It was just a five or six day slumber party. They loved it! It was an inconvenience for us to be living in someone else's house and teaching school, and having a normal job, and moving the pets. But I felt well protected, well informed, well taken care of. The Park was doing everything they could to keep us safe and to keep us updated.

To me it suggests the National Park Service has come a long way - but a lot more science and fire behavior research is needed. Also, a lot more needs to be done to 'package' that data so it is understood by park visitors and nearby communities. I think visitors and neighbors have a general understanding that fire is now commonly used by NPS in Yosemite as a vegetation management tool, but don't understand details of the policy. There is generally an assumption that all lightning caused fires are not suppressed, all man made fires are extinguished, and using prescribed fires as a tool is completely misunderstood.

We are well beyond the time of questioning if fire plays a role or not in managing the Park's vegetation, but I believe the park needs to experiment with prescriptions involving smaller fires where 'fire lines' include mechanically removing vegetation to reduce risk and increase the management of fuels and smoke.

Nothing good. "Nothing good" would be the fact that I'm still suffering way more than I feel that I should have to, due to those policies (number one). Number two would be last year's incredible incident of the ninety acre prescribed burn that somehow, somehow, "well, doggonit, we burned eight thousand, folks. We didn't mean to burn eight thousand, but we did." So yeah, my general perception is not good.

I didn't ever hear, but it may be that the guy who was in charge down there when that happened has been relocated. I don't know. He should have been, probably! It could be that he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. But, be that as it may...

I can conclude by saying that...this summer has been relatively much, much better than any in recent memory – say even in the last five, six, seven years – and I can't even begin to explain why that might be. Maybe it's because the prescribed burning hasn't been enhanced by any major natural fires...or at least – intentionally set by somebody – So from that standpoint, it's kind of nice...but I have a feeling that it's not necessarily the result of a program that that happened; but rather that probably they got a late start. We had an exceptionally wet spring here, especially in this area. It was wet through May.

I guess probably the evidence is the smoke. And then the next is: was it beneficial? Was it necessary? I see repeat burns over the same area over and over again, and so sometimes I wonder “is that by convenience?” I’d rather see the benefit shown. And be honest about it. If you can’t show a benefit, then we say “we’re sorry, we had a problem with this one, and we lost some lands.”

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Q-6 Likes and Dislikes of the Effects of the Fire Management Program. Keeping this idea in the foreground for a moment: what elements do you like or not like about fire and smoke management at the park?

I applaud the Park’s effort to mechanically remove vegetation along roads. I hope that those efforts increase and that the park uses mastication and / or chipping with greater frequency to remove hazardous vegetation.

Burning certain types of vegetation or dead trees can cause even heavier smoke and weather can either cause smoke to linger or disperse. I believe the Park needs to improve its efforts at informing residents and the visiting public on forecast for the kind and density of smoke, how to avoid smoke, and knowing well in advance when to limit outdoors activities during prescribed fires.

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Well you know, I’m not honestly sure that I know what the key elements are. So to say that there are some that I do like – and there may be some that I do like. I don’t know what the elements are.

Let me see what else...Ah! The big question that I’ve never had a chance to get answered...is: as an engineer (and having some knowledge about air pollution) I’m having trouble understanding how it can be that some of these HUGE prescribed burns – and of course not to mention the ones that become much huger than they were supposed to be (which happens way too often – another story, though). How can it be that they are actually not somehow violating federal and/or state air pollution control standards? I honestly believe that they must almost undoubtedly be violating them somehow, but maybe the feds have said “well, you know, because you’re a brother agency here and we understand what you’re trying to do, it’s ok. Go ahead. We’ll look the other way while you violate the air pollution control standards that everybody else has to adhere to.” I don’t know that that’s a fact, but I can’t help but imagine that maybe it is a fact. So, if it’s not a fact, then somebody should set the public a little straighter on that.

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I’m 100% behind it. I work here at the railroad [in Fish Camp]. I talk to people about that every day. Because people will say, “well, what’s with all the branches? And how come the Forest Service has got the blue paint around the trees?” And I’ll tell them the

difference between the Forest Service in the Department of Agriculture, and the Park Service in the Department of Interior, and how burning – in fact, you know they put a little sign down here because I talked to one of the people a couple of years ago, and she and Max – we talked – and they put a sign down there for fire management. And I tell people every day, “go down there and take a look at that.” Because I do get people up here [upset] about them cutting trees down. I respond, “Well, yeah it’s a shame. But put your mind in their spot. This was Indian territory twenty-five years before. We never thought the woods would ever end. So we’ve gotten here for seventy years to stop all fire because we thought that was the right thing to do. Now we’re finding out Mother Nature was a lot smarter than we think...Just look at the forest now.”

I remember up at Summit campground up on Chowchilla Mountain. One time we were going over Chowchilla Mountain (my uncle and I) and he had stopped and said “well, this was one of the camps for the railroad.” I think it was his uncle and some of his boys were hired and doing contract work with the Madera Sugar Pine Lumber Company to cut firewood for the locomotives and stuff. And he said “their camp was up there. They ran all around here chasing chipmunks and stuff.” And I looked over, and the brush was so thick I don’t think a chipmunk could get through now. And I said, “how did you do that?” And he goes, “it wasn’t like this. There was none of the brush. The trees were thinned out.”

I remember as a kid riding horseback (because my grandfather ran the stables). Just about anywhere you wanted to go. As a ranger, it was getting harder and harder. You pretty much had to stay with the trails. And now you can’t hike or even crawl over it, because it’s so thick.

Being selfish – as a private property owner – I see the benefit of the fire protection to our community. Our community provides some amenities to the Park visitor that the Park Service can’t do. So I think it’s important for fire management to protect that – the hotel and some of the things there. I mean, Yosemite is a beautiful place, but it’s not just the trees and the waterfalls and the rocks. It’s the people, the history, the pioneers that came here. And the hotel burning down, the Ahwahnee burning down – they are all manmade stuff, but they’re still part of Park history. And they need to be preserved, too.

Sometimes I wish there was a little bit more information available. But...we had town meetings as a follow-up. Some people felt that they weren’t informed enough. They didn’t know what was going on. But on the other hand, other people felt more informed than they’d ever been. So I think it depends on what individuals need. If some people need to be told every day “What’s happening, what’s happening? What’s the update? I want to see today’s map. How big is the fire? What did it do yesterday?” They want a day by day update. And for me, if I really want that information, I know some people that are involved that I could have called during a busy time and said, “hey, can you give me an update?” I feel like I’m sort of middle of the road. I felt adequately informed; if I wanted more information I knew where to get it. I think the Park did a good job of

keeping the town safe and informed. We had a few meetings. They had sort of like a command center – an information center at the market, at the store down here. Which is great. There was a board, and it wasn't always up to the minute, but there was usually a Park Service employee there, hanging out to answer questions – especially tourists were coming in, and they want to know if you can get to the Park, and they want to know “are my reservations okay?” But Park residents – we hung out down at the store now and then. There's a good swimming hole across the street. And there were popsicles available for the kids. And the helicopters were flying overhead. So, it was actually sort of exciting!

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Q-7 Fire's Impact on the Ecosystem. Could you briefly share your understanding of fire's role in the ecosystem in Yosemite NP? How do you feel fire influences the health of the forest within YNP and the surrounding area?

As far as fire management and smoke issues and all of that, personally, I feel that fire is such a valuable tool for the Park Service to use, and fire is such an important part of the ecosystem, and all the habitat has adapted to a really regular fire. In terms of rain and fire regime, I feel like I live in a fire zone, and we have to deal with it. And I'm not angry or upset about it, usually. I'm inconvenienced sometimes when I get evacuated – but from my perspective, I really enjoy learning from the prescribed fire folks, the fire crews, and I worked with them when I worked with Yosemite Institute years ago, and I would take my student groups to the active burn sites when they were near Crane Flat (there were a couple of years when they were doing burns up there). I think – my overall feelings are very positive.

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It can be very beneficial, except when it becomes cataclysmic and gets out of hand. Otherwise, we have to have the management of the underbrush and the overgrowth. We have to have it. There's no question about it. How we can keep it from becoming cataclysmic is the important role of the Park Service personnel.

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Well, I think I kind of touched on that earlier. I do indeed realize that you need to have the forests cleaned out from time to time. Obviously before there was a Park Service, nature took care of it pretty well anyway. But then with all the years and years of us thinking that the right thing to do was to try to control every fire (and not let anything burn) that was going...the pendulum swung too far the other way, and that was not good. And so I agree that was not good. Undoubtedly that's why we're back kind of into a middle ground here now where the Forest Service and the Park Service are trying to “strike a balance between not doing too much and not doing too little.”

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I fully understand that fire is essential to maintain diversity of the myriad park ecosystems; their vegetation and wildlife, and understand that fire is important to the health of the forest within the park and the surrounding area – but I have no way of knowing to what degree fire influences the health of the forest. This is the role of fire behaviorists, fire ecologists, and botanists, and fire information specialists to explain. I find it hard to believe that the role of fire provides the same or equal influences across the various species types, areas within the Sierra, elevation, etc.

However, as a frequent visitor, nearby resident, and supporter of the Park, I feel the need for Park management to better explain this when describing proposed individual prescribed fire treatments. This is important for me to understand why the NPS chooses prescribed fire as opposed to other solutions to restoring or maintaining park ecosystems.

As an example, I assumed the purpose of the Foresta fire was to reduce hazardous vegetation and reduce the risk of wildland fire around private residents. What was not clear was why the ignition started over a mile away from the private property.

I am totally and absolutely convinced it does influence the health of the ecosystem. I was a protection ranger here in 1970. And in all my life, Mariposa Grove was always open. You could always drive up through there. And I could see how thick it was getting. And in the 1970s, they did some of the first prescribed burns up there. And I remember one night, they were just sweating bullets. And it got a little bit hot. And they had us rangers on the back of fire trucks riding through there hosing the trees down. And they were panicked! But I look at the Grove now, and it's pristine; it's healthy.

You know, I've talked to a lot of people about how the Sequoias need the fire. Probably every day. I talk that spiel up here at the railroad. I see around Wawona the healthiness of the forest.

Right now we're sitting here in the Forest Service [land]. And the dead branches and the dead trees that are because they don't have enough sunlight in this area.

So to me, even the untrained eye can look and see. You watch it rain with that much duff on the ground, and it just runs off. You know I tell a lot of people, "you weed your garden; and then what you have there are good healthy plants. This garden is just a little bigger!"

Q-8 Health Impacts of Fire Management on Personal Life. During the recent past (say, within the past 12-18 months) have you been personally impacted (e.g., experienced discomfort or respiratory ailment, such as asthma) from smoke generated by naturally

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occurring and/or prescribed burning fires within Yosemite National Park? If so, when did this occur and how serious was the impact?

Yes, unfortunately and repeatedly. But last year (last summer) I would say was a pretty bad one. And again, it may have been a combination of events. We can't really separate a real forest fire (which there probably were a couple – it seems like there always are) from the accidental burn that got away and did the eight thousand – which was very nasty for several days. That was one of those things where literally, you really didn't go outside all day long. You did not. Could not. Would not. So, yeah. Like I say, it's definitely a breathing problem for us. We get to the point where we can't breathe very well. And we certainly don't want to be outside.

Mostly my exposure to air pollution has unfortunately been right here in my own house, where I have seen it – over the twenty years I have been here it's kind of gotten (generally speaking) progressively worse from one year to the next. And I'm not sure exactly when it all started. But I know that twenty years ago, we had no smoke problems to speak of. So apparently somewhere maybe between fifteen and eighteen years ago – probably that may have been when some of the national entities got together and decided “well maybe we should do something more serious about preventing the catastrophic forest fires” and maybe that's when the prescribed burning idea – and the idea of intentional burning – something like a lightning strike happens, “let it burn.”

So, I'm thinking that from that point forward is when I started having my problems and my issues. And they're more than “concerns” really; it's become mostly pretty unpleasant to live right here where I live. There may be other parts in this county that are not quite as bad – although I don't know why they wouldn't be, because we're all pretty much just about as close to Yosemite as one another. If you look at the map, you can see that probably 80% of Tuolumne County's population lives between Jamestown and Twain Harte including my own Ponderosa Hills area; with the balance living in the Groveland area.

The analogy that came to my mind this morning was that they always say “the three most important things about real estate are: location, location, location.” From my perspective, the three most important things about fire management and prescribed burning and intentional burning are “smoke, smoke, smoke.” Because I tell you, it really has gotten us to the point where...if we could really afford to move immediately to the coast, we would. We just got back from San Francisco, where two of my daughters live now (in the Bay Area). And gosh! While we were there we said “oh my gosh! We can breathe; we don't get all stuffy at nighttime; we wake up in the morning we feel good; our heads are clear.” One day back here, it's the same old thing: wake up, nose is all stuffed up, the smoke is coming in the windows...And gee whiz, by the time you get to my age, especially, you're kind of tired of this. And you're thinking “why should I have to put up with this?”

So, that gets to I think what I view as the major issue here – which is that the health and well-being of the human population should take priority over the health of the forest. So
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it seems to me that any agency which intentionally burns the forest is missing the very biggest piece of the picture. I would not contest that they may have spent a lot of time and thought and effort arriving at their idea that...it's really good to prevent the hugely catastrophic forest fire that undoubtedly will occur if they don't do something to manage the forest.

I agree with that in principle. But as a practical matter – and having suffered through fifteen smoky summers and other times of year to (which is another issue, but it's kind of all related – I'm thinking that the government folks have lost sight of what the really biggest priority is. Their priority (as I see it) is that they want to at all costs maintain the health of the forest. And that's a very worthwhile objective. But the key seems to be “at all costs.” And I'm not sure that they've taken into account the human costs of...I can't even begin to guess how many humans like myself are suffering quite a lot from those practices of having continuous smoke in the air in much larger degrees than we had here today. Most summers, it's a lot of the time much worse than this, and it's like “gee, which is more important: a healthy forest or a healthy human population to enjoy the forest?” It's almost to the point where they might as well just say “well, gee, we're well on our way to achieving a really healthy forest, folks. But by the way, we understand that it's so smoky you can't stand to live here, so we're just going to let you go live in some other county for a few years until we really get this all fixed up; then maybe we'll be able to trim back on the burning and you can come back” or something. That seems to me to be kind of their thinking. In other words, they have not taken into account, sufficiently, the human element and the...discomfort and more. I'm thinking some people have left the areas – they've had to, for health reasons. I'm not in that bad of condition, but it is bad enough that if I could pick up and leave tomorrow without financial ruin, I would.

So, this is something I feel should be made an important consideration on their part. And I think as I sort of indicated earlier, I'm not sure I have any answer to how we achieve that. As an engineer, I am not aware of any way to have fire and not generate a whole bunch of solid, particulate stuff. (As you know, that smoke is a bunch of nasty solid particles out there which some humans tolerate better than others...but there's plenty of us that are very distressed by it – physically distressed, not to mention mentally). But, I guess I wouldn't be mentally distressed if I wasn't physically distressed to begin with.

Thus in a nutshell, that's my big overall scenario on the situation

As I mentioned when you first arrived, we were waked up by the smoke at 4:01 am this morning and forced to get up to close all our windows. This happens with despairing regularity during recent summers. FOLLOW-UP NOTE: I'm now reviewing this verbal transcript, and it's now 3 weeks after the original interview, and we're still having to get up most nights to close the windows because of the smoke.

The quality of the park experience was compromised for house guests summer 2010, who were unable to enjoy park visual resources and we all experienced watered eyes.

**

You know, I've been hospitalized for smoke inhalation from a hotel fire when I was a police officer. So I have problems with smoke. But I also have a problem with my house burning down, the hotel burning down, and some of those things.

I'm a person who has health issues about smoke. So if a guy is 50 feet away smoking a cigarette, I can smell it and it does bother me. And I know they've been really good – because I've been to the public meetings that they've had – and information I've gotten from the internet that says “ok. We're doing this burn. We've looked at the weather. We know – and I don't know all the terms – there is low pressure (something that's going to keep the smoke down) they don't burn. Yeah, it's there in the morning, but we're not covered in smoke all day long. And I've been around forest fires: you're in smoke for days.

Here, you've got smoke, and you've got an inconvenience for a while in the morning staying out. Keep the windows closed. And then it's gone. And I've really – in the last...I've lived up here permanently for about eight or nine years – haven't had a day where it's been solid smoke. Not one day. So, I think they're doing real well on it. I think the success with the information system that's putting out to people gives people time who have a really bad problem – they can go to Costco in Fresno, because everybody goes to Costco once a week! “let's do it today, and we'll be out.”

**

No. It has not affected me. I can appreciate people who have a problem. When we have to issue smoke masks at the entrance to the Park when they come in, it's necessary. They don't do that now, but they might. Otherwise, you would have to stay away. I am sympathetic more to the need to maintain the forest than the few people who have a problem. And it's too bad. I'm not unsympathetic to their need. But it – if you're going to go into a gas chamber, you better have a mask. Otherwise, you're at your own risk.

**

Also, let people know as best you can. [For example]. “There's this burn happening in the Illilouette drainage, and it's going to be going for the foreseeable future. It could be multiple weeks, and will have increased heavy smoke possible in the evenings in Yosemite Valley and El Portal area.” I've seen announcements like that. And they cover the Park daily. And there's a whole – it seems in the summer time, with fires happening – there's a whole fire section. I get the emails every day, and I generally delete them everyday, because I don't have time to read. But if I'm interested, it's all in there. And it talks about the three fires burning, and it tells about where the smoke impacts will be. So I think the Park is doing a pretty good job with that. If there are significant smoke impacts, they need to communicate more, publicize more, and educate more. Which I feel like they do.

I remember one year. It was in the Illilouette drainage past Mount Starr King. There was a major fire. And I was still working for Yosemite Institute – so that was probably around the year 2000 – 2003 and I was working in the Valley everyday. And boy! Coming into the Valley, it was pea soup. It looked like a dense San Francisco fog day every morning, and the heat would lift the smoke...So that was the only time I've experienced "wow! this is a health risk."

**

Q-9 Sensitivity to Smoke. (Only asked of interviewees who have been personally affected by smoke) How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?

I can leave for a couple of days, or I can keep my windows closed, or not go out in certain periods of time. I look at the smoke and that kind of stuff as an "inconvenience." Just like I look at them working on the road as an inconvenience. But it's there to protect visitors, and people who live there, and employees.

**

Drove park roads with windows up and spent minimum time at scenic overlooks.

**

With the fire last year we definitely had smoke, and it woke me up in the morning. When it first started, every night the smoke would seep down and you'd smell it with the windows open and it was hot, but it cleared out pretty well. There were people that have allergies, that have asthma, that had issues. I don't know of any serious issues. I felt a little affected by it, but mildly.

I think the Park and the fire management program cover their butts and say "there could be this health risk. People with these conditions should exercise caution..." I can't remember what the warnings were, but I feel they weren't overkill if you have a serious respiratory condition, but I feel they were suggesting the extreme: "if you have these issues you should stay inside." I know running the swamp cooler heavily in the evening to cool the house down, and then before I went to bed I closed all the windows, knowing I was going to get smoked out by midnight or 5 in the morning. So, we took some precautions for smoke, just so it wasn't extreme.

**

We are practicing a health program where we try to do at least a thirty minute really rapid walk; not a leisurely little amble through the neighborhood, but serious power walking kind of thing. That had to be stopped. Period. There was none of that. And unfortunately, that's one of the larger negative consequences is when it's smoky out,

you're just not going to do that, or any other outdoor activity. Then of course there's the problem of having to get up in the wee hours to close the windows to keep the smoke out.

**

Q-10 Your Vision of the Future & Proposed Actions. As you reflect upon your responses to Q-5 through Q-9: do you have any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies, related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.

Absolutely! It's simple: start at the top, not at the bottom. Because if you start at the top, fire burns downhill slowly. But if you start at the bottom where it's convenient (because it's along a roadway) it's going to mount beyond what you would envision you would like to accomplish by a control burn. It's tougher that way, but I think the only way it will work. I have been through too many years of watching all of this happen, and not seeing the benefits that can happen.

You have to canvass out the area first, and find the hot spots. And put a cold line around that hot spot. Otherwise, it will get out of hand on you. So when you come to that, you're going down and burning around that hot spot. And yes, that will probably remain unburned, but it's a small area. It takes much more personnel to do it that way, but I think the benefits would be dramatic.

**

Well, in thinking about communicating in a situation like that (the 2009 Big Meadow Fire), we try to communicate town information constantly. And we have an email list. But how many people in town are on the email list? I'm sure less than half; maybe a fourth. And it's only people that are interested and actually sign up, and offer their email address. So I know when we do a town email, it doesn't reach nearly enough people. And you can post things at the store, and the Post Office, and that works fairly well. Everyone goes to the Post Office, but how many people stop to reach the bulletin board? If there's a fire, or an emergency situation, or a lot of smoke, there is usually a fire sandwich board in front of the Post Office which is specifically fire related. And I think anyone that has questions is drawn to that. And that system works fine.

So what happened when we got evacuated, I think they used the reverse 911 system, so that everyone got the same – so that everyone who has a phone got called by the Sheriff recording saying “be prepared for a possible evacuation within the next 24 hours.” We had a town meeting – and I think we got a couple of 911 recorded calls. And that system seemed to work well, and it reaches way more people than the incomplete email list. And not everyone checks their email every day. So I would think that could be utilized even more frequently. Even a daily update. I don't know how expensive or difficult it is, but in these days of computers, I would assume that they make a recording, and they press a few buttons – they pick the town boundaries that they want to inform – and the machine the phones to leave the messages. That might be a way to get you more information, and

people could opt out. People could opt out. You could say, “Do you want daily updates, or just the emergency updates?” And so, it’s the same thing with the school district. There are snow days. And I’ve chosen to opt out because I got so tired of hearing when Mariposa had a snow day, because we never take snow days. And a cancelled football practice – I don’t need to know that!

I think that system is probably sophisticated enough that it could be used to update people more frequently, but you could choose the level of communication. So if there’s going to be a big burn day, or there’s going to be a smoke day, or they’re burning in the Park, and at night it’s going to come down, they put it in the Park Daily (which is the daily announcement), but that bulletin goes out to an email list. And it gets posted a few places around the Park, but not everyone gets it. So I think that if everyone with telephones could have a choice of all the updates, only the emergency updates, only fire-related updates, or something like that, people could opt in or out, and then you might get during fire season – maybe you get a call every couple of days saying “there’s going to be a burn in Crane Flat for the next three days, and it may be affecting you down stream in Midpines and El Portal in the evening hours.” And then I would say, “oh, that’s interesting. I know that. Maybe then I’ll go running in the morning, because I don’t want to breathe heavy in the evening.” It’s a way to reach more people.

The bulletin boards put up daily, and the email lists work, but they definitely miss a piece of the community. So, that’s an idea. And – the fire boards are good.

I feel the fire program is well done overall.

Sure. Somehow (it doesn’t matter what we call it), whether it’s a recommendation or a suggestion. But I feel that somehow, we must ensure that the Park Service does recognize and understand that’s there more of a health effect on the populace out here than they may realize, and that we really expect – not just want, or wish – but we really expect that they take some kind of a positive measure to...somewhat mitigate and ameliorate the severity of the smoke problem, because it’s such a pervasive and invasive situation. It seems, in most summers, to be without end. Day after day, and week after week, and you almost get to the point where you want to shoot somebody. You really start getting really fed up. So that would be my main thought on that.

- 1. NPS needs to start with more dialogue between individuals with breathing problems that might be affected by smoke from fire. The Park should develop a call-out list (like reverse 911) with frequent updates.*
- 2. Visitors en route to the park need to be provided with more detailed information about fire and smoke issues.*
 - a. Use digital information highway signs.*

So, education of our kids in fire management, smoke management – because they’re living in the [San Joaquin] Valley. That’s where the air quality board, and the air quality is bad. So when they see smoke coming up from the hills, it’s “uhhh. What are they doing up there now?” Well, these little kids are saying “I know what they’re doing up there right now!” Because if there’s a forest fire, it’s going to be like this for days. Here’s one or two days to help prevent a catastrophe in the form of a major forest fire.

**

Q-11 Specific Actions. What specific actions would you like to see to move the Fire Management Program from where it is now to where you would like it to be in the future? What role do you see the Fire Management Program playing in such actions? Please be as specific as possible.

- 1. I think a regional interagency fire plan that involves stakeholders from all the Federal, State, County agencies, and all local communities. Two years after the Telegraph Fire, local property owners still do not see how managing their land contributes to the health of surrounding forest ecosystems or potentially how they could be a part of the solution to managing hazardous vegetation.*
- 2. There is a need to develop a plan for hazardous vegetation management for the next 30 to 50 years.*
- 3. Yosemite needs to take a more active role in organizations like the Sustainable Forest & Community Collaborative <https://sites.google.com/site/sustainablesierragroup2/>; an amazing group of government agencies and private property owners concerned about healthy forest in the Yosemite region.*

**

When there are fires (and there always will be, and always have been), if there’s the possibility to have more staff on the ground, in the right locations, to educate the public. Sometimes there’s a sign at a turnout on the Tioga Road, and it’s usually a place where there’s a straight away and people have a big turnout, and they say “oh, there’s a sign” and they pull over to figure out where’s the fire burning. That’s the kind of place that with just a few more interpretive staff or fire staff (even Yosemite Conservancy volunteers). Good volunteers could be trained to understand management issues and could educate hundreds or thousands of the public. Which is a wonderful thing. Being a teacher, I’ve always felt like we’ll get \$50 million dollars into the Park for a new bridge, or “oh, we have to fix the culvert” (and I know infrastructure is important, and I know maintenance is important). But I always think, “we don’t need \$50 million; how about a few million in an endowment that could just fund ten more rangers, or ten more volunteers, or trainees...to be on the three or four really over-populated trails, to educate people about litter, about feeding the animals, about just all the issues that the folks that live here understand, but people coming in – they just need to be educated. Most people aren’t – they’ll comply with the rules if they know why. People will drive 25 if they know the reason is because seven bears were killed on this stretch last year. If it’s just 25,

people say “what? this is so safe I can drive 50.” And you could safely. But if you know you could hit one of the four Great Grey Owls with your windshield, and kill it (and there’s only four in the Park)...but “that’s why it’s 25?” Because you might run over an incredibly endangered or threatened species, like the fisher or Great Grey Owl. Then I think the vast majority of people will drive 25 for the next two miles, because speeding kills bears. So I think education is by far the most important – well in my opinion the most lacking piece of the puzzle. And the Park and the volunteers do as much as they can with so little. But I always want more.

**

...We have smoky conditions here year around now thanks to the county’s policies of allowing citizens to burn as soon as the feds stop burning. With the federal agencies doing their prescribed burning and intentional leaving of accidental fires burning in the summertime, that occupies those months of the year when our local county says “okay, citizens, you are not to burn anything.” And that’s very correct. “You are not to burn anything, because it’s too dry, it’s too dangerous etc.” Okay, well and good. So, all summer long, the Forest Service and the Park Service, the BLM and all those guys are burning, and creating smoke. Then as soon as they finish, it’s November and the first heavy rains come and then the county says “okay, citizens, you can start burning again.” And they do! From my perspective up here, I can see half the county out there. And it is so disgusting on the first few days – theoretically, it’s illegal to burn wet stuff, and all that – they burn in the rain, they go out...most people seem to have this idea...oh gosh...they just love to create smoke! I swear to gosh, because...I have a lot to burn here, too. I’ve got an acre of stuff – I’ve got mountains of slash and brush that I clean every year – but I wait until it’s really, really thoroughly dry. I make very little smoke. But most people make lots of smoke. So guess what? From November until May, when the county says “okay, citizens, now it’s your turn, burning season is open” these idiots are out there creating more smoke. So I NEVER get a break from the smoke. And I need a break! So all it would take to fix that other eight months of the year when it’s also smoky as hell here, is for the county to say “okay, citizens are no longer going to be allowed to burn their stuff.” And that would be a tremendous improvement. Then at least we’d only have to deal with the federal guys...and they’re probably a little more sensible about this, anyway. So hopefully, we’ll all get to a point – perhaps especially if there are more dialogues like these going on – and the Park Service and the Forest Service listens to the people out there who are mostly pretty unhappy with the situation, maybe we’ll get somewhere.

Do I have an actual “thing” I can offer? I wish I did...Maybe I do. Off the top of my head. As I said, I don’t see how you can achieve what the Forest Service folks want to achieve without burning; but at the same time, there is no way to minimize the smoke impact. If you’re going to burn, you’re going to have “x” tons of smoke particulate coming out as a result.

I love the sound of “alternatives to burning.” I don’t know what it would be, but if some bio-engineers or environmental engineers somewhere have got some other ideas on how

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to clean up the forest without burning it – man! I would be all for it. One hundred thousand percent! In fact, that is where I would spend my \$10 million dollars.

My suggestion: if we call with inquiries about things that are pretty obvious news, and they don't have information, offering to find it. I can't say they should know everything that happens in this giant National Park. I mean, they couldn't. But, to take the next step: which is "let me find out." I know they have access to all the rangers' logs for the day, and it would be very easy for them to take that next step and say "well, let me find out and get back to you." But you often don't get that. Maybe that's not part of their training, or maybe that comes from the top. I don't know...

Retraining of the forest management people to – it's kind of a common sense thing – burn more gradually downhill. And then you have holidays, and you have to factor in the winds. Sometimes you can have a down draft, and that's not good either. The thing is, we're having to fight wildland fires without water. That's a given. Unfortunately with CalFire, they don't understand that. That's not the way it works in the wild out here. And I think the Park Service understands that, but now they have to be retrained or to rethink the control methods that they use. Make it simple, from the top down.

Q-12 Inaction. What would be your concerns if what you proposed is not acted upon?

Well, I don't see a big disaster or anything. But I see a missed opportunity I think. The people that come to Yosemite tend to come because they want to enjoy the natural environment. They want to have their time outdoors. And the message is out there, over decades, that fire is good and can be good. And I think most people appreciate that. If they come for their once-in-a-lifetime or once a year trip to Yosemite and it happens to be a real smoky week because the Park is burning the meadows in the Valley that week, they all hate fire and they won't agree with it, because "it's affected my family reunion" or "my hike." "I couldn't see the views, and that was the day they burned." With education and communication, people will be less likely to react negatively. The media will be less likely to react negatively. So, if there's less education, if there's less communication, if the fire management program has a lower budget and can't do some of these things, I would think that it would – I would think the general public would have less of an appreciation for the role of fire in the ecosystem. They would have more of an adversarial – maybe anger is too strong of a word, but they'd be more upset with the Park Service for making smoke, for burning the forest. They would lose, I think from a science perspective, the understanding of us living with the natural world, living with fire as opposed to trying to control it or prevent it, or stop it. I just think that people's awareness, people's sense of understanding of the role that fire plays would be reduced. I don't see big conflicts like lawsuits...I don't see it as such an extreme issue, because I think it's being managed well. I think it's going well.

I know that some downstream communities – they have certain air quality targets they're supposed to meet, based on other pollutants. And so when the fire management folks want to burn, they have to communicate. At certain times of the year you really can't burn. The conditions might be perfect, but they can't burn because the Central Valley can't afford any more particulates coming downstream. So, it's a very complex web of agencies that have to communicate.

**

You know, you'll have the uninformed visitor that does not know what's going on. I hear people in the train every day saying "grrr. Why do they do that?" Well, if you knew why, and understood, you would support that. Even if you didn't support it, you wouldn't be so negative. "Well, ok, I can understand the theory behind it."

So, you'd have more people coming up here that don't understand what's going on. We've made a big thing about "here's why Yosemite Valley was carved out" and "why do we have this U-shaped valley." I think the state geologist in the 1800s said that it was all uplifted. And Muir goes, "Nooo, it was a glacier that came through." And they battled and battled for years. And Muir turned out to be right. Well, it's the same idea. And so we spend a lot of time teaching people about how the Valley was formed.

How about teaching how to take care of the forest? And if we don't do that, you then get people who are uninformed and won't support what the Parks are perceived doing as far as fire management – which I think is a very, very good thing to do.

**

The result would be that I would step up my efforts to get the heck out of this county. I would definite accelerate my time schedule, and just move away. Because I couldn't fight it. I'm almost seventy. You get to the point where you say "well, you know, geez, I love it here; I moved here thinking I would stay here forever. But somebody changed the game plan. They changed the rules on me, and they're going to make the air unbreathable, and there's nothing I can do to stop them. So, I have no choice. I am going to leave."

**

I think then I would probably elect to go to the media. And get public support for an experienced method of doing something right. I think politics has a lot to do with it. If the Park Service can't do it right I'd work with the Forest Service to try to get them to understand the same philosophy. And then I would get the Department of Agriculture to meet with the Department of the Interior, and so on...

**

As Chair of the Midpines Planning Advisory Committee, I see a huge void in what residents of Midpines understand about the Park's fire management policy and program
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and how that policy addresses issues and concerns of stakeholders in gateway communities. It may not be, but there is a perception that the fire program lacks credibility. And so I think from my perspective the Park is faced with a major challenge in educating the public – from that casual visitor to the resident that lives there, to the individuals that live in the gateway communities.

**

Q-13 Personal Commitment and Responsibility. How do you see yourself personally involved in bringing about your suggested changes?

Well, I'm certainly willing to talk with – in any kind of a format – with the folks on the other side. And share whatever...maybe if I really think on it, I can come up with some better ideas.

**

I would be willing to offer my expertise to sit down with the fire management people with the Park Service, to help them fulfill this. And understand: I think the understanding may be there, but they say “well it costs more money.” Well then, we'll have to budget that and do it in smaller increments to get it accomplished. Whatever it takes. Otherwise, you're going to have this wholesale devastation which none of us wants. And it increases the amount of smoke, too.

**

I think being kept informed as to what is going on within the park, and occasionally having Park representatives attend meetings like our monthly Midpines Planning Advisory Committee meeting. I think it is ironic that there are many park employees who live in Midpines and seldom or never participate in the monthly meetings. There are planning advisory committees for each of the 11 communities in Mariposa County. They are appointed to these committees by the County Board of Supervisors, and attempt to represent the views of all residents within the 5 County supervisorial districts as a means to glean local planning issues and concerns.

**

Over the last number of years I've become very involved in our school up in Wawona. We're in a flux where the school is leaving the school district in Oakhurst and moving back to Mariposa. We may do a lot of things. The Park Service has been very supportive. Steve Shackelton has taken us from just a group a people fighting to really getting some things done. And then the local rangers and Park Service people have done so much.

I want to continue...where I want to see myself is (because as chairman of the Yosemite-Wawona Educational Foundation) it puts me in the position where I can push what I

should no longer call “my agendas”...but I can push. And one of the things is this fire safety. Our kids walk out the door and they’re in Yosemite National Park. Let’s build on that. There are Park Service employees up here with great education, experience, knowledge that our kids ought to be just soaking that up every day. And not just because that’s their dad coming home or their mom; it’s some of the other people. So, I’m going to continue to push our school – and hopefully we can include the Valley – in more education for our people but to the outside. Invite other schools up to our school for let’s say a week-long thing like what Taro did. Let’s build on that. And maybe – I’ve been trying to get UC Merced...and I know Shackelton -- we met with some people – Moose talking about doing some stuff like that. Kingsburg High School comes up every year to the Wawona School. (Our kids go down there). They come up here, and they experience a week up here in the wilderness. Let’s make sure that there’s a block in there of four hours or a day even where the Park Service people can come in and say, “here’s what’s going on in our forest.” And it pertains right now to Yosemite. But if they go to Yellowstone or anywhere else for a forest – a Forest Service area – it’s the same knowledge. The trees are different, the topographical area is different, but it’s the same idea.

If you term it “indoctrination” it’s an indoctrination to teach them “what is a healthy forest, and how do you get there?”

Q-14 Interest in Public Participation. Would you be interested in participating in facilitated dialogues with Fire Management Program staff and other interested people concerning fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding area? If so, do you have any suggestions regarding how you would like such dialogues to be organized and facilitated?

Sure.

I think Fire Management Program staff should occasionally attend the Planning Advisory Committee meetings.

Absolutely! In fact, I would help manage such a meeting. I would be more than happy to facilitate it.

Absolutely yes! I think I would like to see, first of all, that the people on the public side be allowed pretty much free dialogue (speak as much or as little as they want without being shut down or whatever), and I think also...it might be useful, in the case of this

county (where the majority of the county population is impacted by Yosemite actually live in the neighborhood of two hours from the Valley floor) for some of those to take place not so far away. Because otherwise, there's not going to be as many people that are willing to go two hours each way to talk about something. As a retired person, heck, day time meetings are great. That would be preferred.

**

Q-15 Interest in Personal Dialogue with Fire Management Program Personnel.

Would you be interested in having someone from the Fire Management Program contact you to discuss your concerns and ideas?

Of course! I would have to have the top level – a joint meeting with the Park Superintendent on down. But including a number of people who have expertise in the field at doing this. So that they can be there to rebut “you’re all wet;” “you’re on target” because sometimes, these people at the line level are not listened to. And by bringing in an outside voice of expertise that says “this should be listened to. Listen to your folks! They know what needs to be done.”

**

Sure. I think so. The answer is “yes.” I guess I was hesitating – and I’m not even sure why I was hesitating. I guess I was worried about who was going to be on the other end. If it was just kind of a...like we have the national press secretary. Well, you know if I wanted to talk to Obama about some important issues, I don’t especially want to talk to the press secretary.

**

I already have this.

**

Yes.

**

Q-16 Receiving more information. Would you be interested in receiving more detailed information describing the Park’s current guidelines governing decision-making? If you are interested, please note that only your name and telephone number (and not your responses to these questions) will be provided to Fire Management Program personnel.

Yes.

**

I do. I know generally – what I'd like to know is...or even tag along some time when people go in to an area that is going to be a prescribed burn, how do they go in and look for endangered animals, and flora and fauna. What do they do about it? Do they put a fire line around it? What do they do?

I'd like to know more about that, because I think then I can pass that on to other people. When I was in the Park Service, I fought a number of wildland fires. They sent me to a structure fire school. So I've got a pretty good idea how the fire part of it is. (I'm by no means up on the latest fire science). So I have a pretty good idea of backfires and fire lines...I think the more people we get to do that, they'll understand what the Park Service is doing.

You know Taro, last year when the prescribed burn got away from them. He was sick. Literally sick about it. And I remember calling him up at his house and just leaving a message saying "you know what? I support you. I know our community is safer because of the efforts of you and your people. Mother Nature can be very humbling." The next day he stops me and he says, "oh, I've been humbled!" I think if more people were exposed to it, they would understand it, and they would be more supportive of it. Which – it's a nice thing people support the Park. But, really what's important: is knowing what a healthy forest is. And they're going to do their best.

My wife and I hike – and she's nuts about seeing trash on the ground. And she'll pick it up. We can be anywhere, and she'll pick it up. So by the time we hike out...Well, why don't we get to the guys that threw it down in the first place? And so they know the forest, and they can love and appreciate it. And then they won't [litter]. And this is Joe Q from the middle of the city. How do we get to them, and educate them when they come up to the forest, to be part of it, enjoy it...You know, the old "pack in and pack out." I mean most of us who backpack and go back on horseback we understand it. But lots of locals don't. They don't do it in the city. There are trash cans everywhere. And so, "this is our city, and I'm not going to dirty it." This is your forest!

And so for me, education is probably the key.

I would. That's all good.

I think these agencies need to work together, and know where their boundaries are, and where their expertises are. And yes, I would be very much in favor of helping to bring these groups together – including the public's awareness of the necessity of clearing our forests with the inconvenience from time to time of smoke. It's a natural – there's no other way...there's no other practical way that we could do it. I do not mind sharing my responses to the interview questions with fire management personnel.

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Q-17 If **\$10 million dollars** were to become available for use within the Yosemite region and you were the person able to decide just how those funds would be used, how would you spend them? While your priority might focus exclusively on Yosemite's fire management program, please don't feel limited in your response.

If \$10 million dollars suddenly became available to deal with my issues, again what I would say is education. But I also know that if you said there's a big huge grant, and you got all the fire management people together and said "here's what we've got." I know there would be some things (piece of equipment, more staff). Their funding is so complicated. I know it's the manager's nightmare to figure how to fund this or that.

I would love to see more fire education. The more the better. I'm thinking of the general public. Maybe a few people get hired as community liaisons, and they give a campfire program in Yosemite Valley three nights a week specifically on fire management. It's not necessarily an interpretive ranger giving the talk. Maybe a slide show from fire fighters who have some exciting stories to share which the public loves. But also they could fit in the education piece of "this is why we burn things on purpose. This is why we let things burn. This is when we put out fires, and this is when we let them go."

I want big money to go to people. Isn't there some way of putting big money in a fund that guarantees, you know, ten more interpretive rangers, or ten more fire educators, or twenty more employees doing fire surveys, or whatever for a ten or twenty or thirty year period. Couldn't you bank that just like everyone else does? Everyone (through endowments and trusts) funds things that way except the government. Is there an act of Congress – is there a new law that needs to be passed where Parks could use their money more wisely and more long term? [Right now] the funding is based on next year's budget from Congress.

**

That's a fair question. I guess I have a strong feeling about fire prevention / fire management on government lands. I would look for some outside expertise. The Forest Service has infinitely more land than the Park Service does. And they have infinitely more equipment, and to a greater extent, expertise. I guess I might opt that the Department of Agriculture should do the fire management program for the Park Service as well, because they're such a small group of people...that to have a redundancy – the importance of preservation of the natural beauty is just as strong in the national forests as it is in the Park. And so I guess if that \$10 million dollars were available, I would hope that it might be something that could be shared with multi-agencies. And I would only include the Forest Service, and not necessarily CalFire. I don't consider CalFire experts in wildland forest management. BLM basically has more of the same land that CalFire has – more rangelands and more grasslands. Not to discredit them at all. And neither agency. But I think their expertise is to fight fire with water, where in the

National Parks and the National Forests we don't have that luxury. We have to use other methods to control fires. And I have many, many years of experience with that.

We could do this in a pilot area. Let's try something that might work. Some things haven't worked so well in the past (such as control burns getting out of control), and there's a better way to do it. For instance: borate bombing was not approved by the Park Service for many, many years. And the first time it happened, it was done by the first fire boss on a major fire inside the Park from the Forest Service. He ordered it. And he realized that suddenly, he was in real hot water because the Park Service didn't like it largely because of the color. Now, there's a new problem that wildlife is being affected by it (I just recently heard about that). I don't know what it is, but I'm sure it can be ameliorated. The effect of this kind of fire suppression has been highly effective. And it has to be colored so you can see where you're putting it. But that color goes away. And that was the objection of the Park Service. But things like that – I think we need to use all the tools that the major agencies have. And there are only two agencies: the big one is the Forest Service; secondary is the Park Service. Use the tools that they've learned in fighting wildland fires. And then when you start to create the fire, that's a new science...

I think we just need more cooperation with the other agencies, and we don't need to duplicate our efforts.

I honestly hadn't even gotten my thinking to realize that well, maybe there are some alternatives to the burning. And so if there aren't any, then some of that money would need to be spent on that very subject of "let's find some." But if it turns out that someone has already spent quite a good deal of money in research (qualified research) on that, and that there are some of the alternatives – then those would need to be explored, and perhaps funded, to see if indeed they are effective. That's where it would all go. To do away with the smoke! That would be the end objective: do away with, or at least minimize, the smoke.

It's still my belief that the Yosemite fire management program – and all the other fire management programs run by the other agencies – somehow must come to realize what is actually more important. Is it the health of the forest, or is it the health of the public? That's just my bottom line. I can't help but think that the health of humans is more important than the health of the forest, if you have to choose between the two of them. It seems they're choosing between the two, but they're choosing the wrong one.

If \$10 million were made available: I worked for the Park Service when I was finishing college, and after I got out of college I was a protection ranger. But we did do firefighting and stuff like that. My plan was to be a ranger...but I got more involved in law enforcement...Because of that experience: Congress has given the Park monies or at
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least bought land that we need to take care of. And sometimes when the Congress or administration wants to get more and more public land – and some of this absolutely needs to be preserved – but we’ve got some wonderful stuff (like Yosemite National Park), and you look at the infrastructure (of the roads, the bathrooms, the personnel who take care of the Park), it frustrates me to see all this land; and yet they can’t even take care of it. And when I say “can’t” – usually it’s in monetary terms: they just don’t have the funds to do it; the money to hire the people to do it. When I was here there were 70 law enforcement rangers. The last time I talked to one of the chief rangers there’s like 35. And we still have issues here (it’s not like the nights in 1970 when I was here) but we still have issues here. Then it was more civil unrest. Now it’s more the protection of people against people (some of the people you get from the cities, who come up; and there’s gang issues and things like that – we’ve had some serious crimes). Do we have enough fire services to protect both the structures here and the wildlands?

If there was \$10 million, I would put it into the infrastructure (buildings, roadways, bathrooms, water and septic systems). And we have an issue with the water system. It’s almost maxed out. But yet just a few miles up the road at Billydoo, there are hundreds of gallons that leak every day out of that system. And granted there are some political issues (some with the Forest Service, some with the Park Service), but those are the kind of issues where good water, good sewer systems protect the environment. And I’m not looking at this just as a property owner; I’m looking at it everywhere.

The Yosemite Conservatory now (it used to be the Yosemite Fund) [has funded improvements in] the Yosemite Falls trail, the Olmstead Point, Tunnel View. Gorgeous! Just gorgeous! And those are things that need to be done. And it’s too bad to have to go to the outside to get some of that stuff done. I’m glad that people want to get involved in their parks. It’s their parks. But, they still need to have the personnel to do it.

Pioneer History Center [in Wawona]. When I was up here after they built it, it was open every day, every building. They had people there that were cooking. One of the guy’s name was John Clark, who was dressed up as a cavalry guy. He was an older fellow, and he would talk about the early cavalry days. I don’t think I have ever seen any of the buildings open, except for the stagecoach, in the last four or five years. Where are the naturalists that could stand there and talk about that kind of stuff? Even seasonal naturalists?

So that’s what I would say. The infrastructure mainly for personnel and construction are the biggest things.

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Q-18 Additional Comments. Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you'd like to add?

Let me see if there's anything else I wanted to cover here while I'm thinking about it... Well I did make a note to myself that I actually would prefer a one-time hundred year catastrophic forest fire to being subjected to a daily and weekly Chinese water torture kind of thing from the smaller amounts of everyday smoke while they're fixing the problem gradually. From my perspective, I would rather have it done once every hundred years and be done with it, rather than the continuous lower level smoky assault of the current programs. For weeks at a time, there's just no relief from the smoke.

**

Summer is the tough air quality season for most communities downstream of the Park. And so I feel they try to do their prescribed burns in the shoulder seasons (spring and fall) because the conditions are better to keep it under control. And also because there's not the air quality issues in May that there are in August in the Central Valley. So I think they're already doing that kind of thing. They have to be real careful about summer burns.

**

It would be worthwhile for the Park and all stakeholders to get together to explore examples of how ALL federal agencies and private property owners could collaborate to restore forests to ecological health, reduce the risk of catastrophic fire, and take other actions to create economic activity to create and sustain jobs in their Yosemite area.

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NPS Study Responses – Tribal Government

Q-1 Relationship to Yosemite National Park. I'd like to begin by asking you to describe your "connection" to Yosemite National Park (and the Fire Management Program, if possible).

My connection to Yosemite is – knowing that it's my traditional homeland. When I go there, I'm just...I enjoy it like...I'm at home! And people say "well, you guys are so far away." But in reality, if you really look at it, the Pacific Crest Trail goes from Mexico all the way up these mountains – the Sierras – all the way up to Canada. Now if you really think about it, before it became the "Pacific Crest Trail," it was our traditional trails, and our trading routes. We created those! And so, if you look at both sides of the mountains, we have trails that come up – and you need that one to go all the way up. So, nobody can tell me that those are not...that we're not connected. We are connected. Very much connected. I mean...that's my home! I know some people who have family members here (Bishop Tribal member) and their families come from that area. Our Vice-Chairman's family comes from over there. So there are variations of people who have married into seasonal camps. That's how we travel. We trade. We have marriages happen. Back then, that's the way it was done. We traded obsidian, or pine nuts – or whatever we had on this side we traded with them over there. And so that would create the family and marriages that came out of that.

And as for fires – I fought fires in Yosemite. I didn't have asthma when I started, but I think all the inhalation of the smoke (as a wildland fire fighter) is what created or caused my asthma. In my seventh year of doing it, I couldn't pass that test anymore. I weighed less than what I weighed in high school, but I couldn't pass the test anymore. And I finally went to the doctor to figure out what was wrong, and come to find out I had asthma. It's called exerciser-induced asthma. And so only when I did exercises at these sporting events I started getting constricted in there. And so it made it a little bit difficult. And so I resigned; it was either that or get fired, and I didn't want "fired" on my record so I resigned at the age of 22 to look for a different kind of job.

**

It's a beautiful, beautiful jewel of the Sierra Nevadas. I have a lot of pride in having such a beautiful Park near us. And also, I have worked in Yosemite National Park in my fire management career – when I was with the Sierra Hot Shots – several fires I've been to. Back when I was way back in the wilderness working on fires – it's a really beautiful land! One of my more cherished memories (if you can call that a memory) – is when I had to hike out of the wilderness in the Yosemite National Park, eight miles all by myself. No radio. Just a shovel. And so I really became one with the land. (I was an Assistant Foreman on a Hot Shot crew. That's how I got out there). And after "x" amount of days fighting fire out there, I was notified that my uncle had passed away. And so there were arrangements made to pick me up and to transport me back to the work center so I could

make arrangements to attend his funeral). So that's how I ended up walking eight miles out by myself. I had to leave my radio with the Hot Shot crew when I walked out. And I really absorbed the wilderness.

So, that was one of the ways. And other than that it's been visiting with my family and friends – taking people up to the Park. I've also done some prescribed fire work with the Park Service (when I was on the Hot Shots and the Westfall Engine crew) in and around the Grizzly Giant. I've had some fine lunches and dinners provided by the Park Service!

I've driven through that route going up through Tioga Pass, going through the Valley, on other fire assignments. So Yosemite is a familiar area, for me, to work and to visit.

And I would like to know more about Yosemite National Park, and working with the Tribal Relations person, or their heritage resource program folks. I don't know enough of their people; I've never met anybody there. But I look forward to making those connections. Whoever that new person [Tribal Relations] would be to hire, I feel because the Sierra National Forest is our boundary, it would be good to have that National Park Service – Forest Service connection. I work well with Tom Burge, the Park Archeologist, here on the Sequoia-Kings Canyon NP. Tom has been very supportive, and I do whatever I can to help him – and he helps me. But also, I need that connection with Yosemite National Park. So, it's something to follow-up.

That gives you a little familiarity and a little connection. I've worked on the Park in that manner, and I also work with Tribal Relations here. And I would like to establish more of that with the Park Service in the future.

**

Q-2 Sources of Information for Fire Management Activities and Events. What are your preferred sources of information for learning about Fire Management Program activities and events? Why are these sources preferred?

I read things through the newspaper. I don't really get that much via the internet. But then again, I haven't visited the website, either, lately. Letters are ok (I get a lot of letters, and it's hard enough getting letters and sort them out from the Forest Service or other agencies). The Park Service sends me quite a few things, too – Sequoia-Kings Canyon...they send me enough stuff via the letters. But I think emails would be good...just because it helps me better manage my information. But also, if it's something that might affect or impact the local tribes in and around that area, so I can forward that on and share that email information with them. So that's an easier way.

**

Email would be great. Because when I get those emails, I look at them (depending on what it is) and I kick it right to the front desk. And I'm pretty sure they post it somewhere. If something really big is happening, I can always put it into the newsletter

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which would go out quarterly. You know, there's all these other ways for people to find out.

**

Q-3 Your Understanding of Fire Management's Decision-Making Process. Could you please briefly describe your understanding of how Fire Management decisions are arrived at within Yosemite National Park?

Well, it's similar to the Forest Service, as far as when it comes to...fuels reduction, taking care of the watersheds, safety (such as hazardous tree falling). Safety first. The other part of it is: best available use of resources. And the other part of it is "do we have to take action, or let it go?" I know that [the Park Service] has competent professional fire managers making these decisions. Because they work with my competent and professional managers. And we do everything we can to help each other out.

Those are some of the things that we're all trying to take care of the land in a good way. And I think that the – my background in fire management, is how geographical areas (topography, slope, fuel and all that) are taken into consideration. I support a lot of the decisions that are taking all that into consideration – but also, the safety aspect of it. That's what it all comes down to: do you have available resources? Timing matters a lot. Smoke – you know there's going to be smoke. But it's going to be part of the process that's going to come out of our actions. You're going to have to deal with the smoke.

But look what we did to clear up this land that was previously a brush field – a lot of it dead and down. Or a lot of it just piled up and never before burned. Dead and down trees and brush fields. So, I take all of that into consideration. When I was a member of the Hot Shot crews, this is a scenario where maybe we need to slick it off, you know.

But those are the types of things that when I think about describing my understanding of how the decisions are arrived at...whether it be prescribed fire or whether it be wildland fire and everything, all things come into consideration. And it all comes up with good planning and tactics. Because there's got to be people out there to manage it. I mean, right now we've got fires up on this Park (Sequoia-Kings) right now where it's working with the Forest Service, where you let it (burning material) tumble around (it goes from one place to another place and another place – just like how water spreads.) Where is it going to escape to? Because it's surrounded by rocks or other natural barriers. If it keeps on going, it's going to tumble down there, and tumble down there. But we've got a bunch of natural barriers – whether it is a lake, or a pond or riparian area. It's ok. Is it putting up smoke? Yes. But that's part of fire. It's not threatening anything (no structures or anything).

But fire is part of the environment. That's what fire managers take into consideration. "Is this really good for the land?" And if so, and what I've heard before from some of my tribal elders and leaders that I've worked with, "so why not let fire do its job, Dirk? It's part of how we always managed the land." You're right. That's correct. But they've

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gotten to the point where you don't let it start taking off too bad, you know. But wildfire resources – again, decision making – make a difference on whether or not that was a very successful burn that turned out really good. What happens right now? Let rain put it out. What happens by letting this 2,000 or 3,000 acre fire burn? It cleaned up the environment, and looks really good. Mother Nature needs that.

So, fire management decisions are made in a good and a professional manner, with all things considered.

**

I have no idea. I would like to have more information, because you don't know if that area – they're very sensitive about cultural things (and where they're at) – but still, there's always that possibility of having a fire planned in an area where they may not have knowledge. So I don't know if they're actually going out and surveying those areas. I'm sure they are, but it would be good to be at the same plate with them. To know at the get-go. It would be good to know those things in the pre-stages.

**

Q-4 Impact of Media Releases. If you heard about a smoke event through the media (for example, via media release): what information would influence your decision to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away? Please elaborate.

I would find out how extensive the smoke damage is. If it's really bad, then I wouldn't go at all. Not me. Other people would. And the thing is: I love smoke! You cannot fight fires for seven years and not love it. I just love that smell...breathe it in. But I suffer the next day, and the extent of the suffering depends on how much I am exposed to. And so I have to make myself go around it (as much as I love it). I mean, if we have a fire in the valley, then I'm on my roof watching that fire, because I love it! But, the damage afterwards is so horrible. I hate it. The suffering. The migraines. The headaches. I can't breathe. The chronic coughing. And if I don't catch it, the sinus gets bad and then drops into my chest and turns into bronchitis. It's just not fun.

**

Well, that's a good question here. I like this one, because "what information would influence my decision?" I'd like to know the dates ahead of time, because before I go and reserve a campground for my family or my family outing, why would I want to do it when the Valley is full of smoke? So, as early as possible notification.

But that goes back to education. About "Hey, everybody. If you really want to see what a burn looks like and everything" we might have information sharing about the day when we're going to light off this piece of land. "But, there's going to be a lot of smoke!" Therefore, you're letting people know ahead of time about – if you have any asthmatics

or breathing conditions or something very adverse to smoke – then you tell them ahead of time.

But educate all at the same time. That would influence my decision to visit Yosemite National Park. Or, just because they say it's a prescribed fire, "stuff" happens! Things do escape. I want to know where is it going to be at. And I hope the one way in, and the one way out, doesn't have traffic backed up there. So, I want to know about that.

I'd also like to see it take off. But then, I'd like to come back and see it afterwards. What did it do? I like to see results.

So those are the types of things I think about in a media release. Maybe do a little bit of (10 to 15 minute vignettes) about "this is what we're going to do. This is how we're going to do it. These are the methods that we're employing. These are the people – the hard working men and women – that are on the ground resources available." And then after it's all said and done, "this is the result. Look at the goodness. We did the right thing."

Now all things considered: you hope everything turns out all right! Things do get away, though.

**

Q-5 Fire and Smoke Management Assessment. When you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?

I would say that they should be notifying the tribes around them, because I don't know what they're doing with fire – only through Jeanette (the cultural aspects) I know things. But not fire. Other than hearing by word-of-mouth.

**

Past mistakes. At Foresta for example. I couldn't understand why is it that the Park Service would light that prescribed fire off at the wrong time of the year. As a former Hot Shot crew member, it was like "isn't that a little risky in July or August?" I remember it happened in the middle of fire season. And like "WHAT are they doing?" It's way too hot. If you want a rip-roaring fire, then this would be the time to light it...It just didn't make sense to me. It didn't compute. But then again, that's the Department of the Interior, Park Service. And those guys [The Park Service] got a lot of bad press out of that.

It's just that the Forest Service has these rules and regulations, and consideration of the timing and funding, in order to get the ok to even begin thinking about doing something like that.

Very few Forest Service folks that I know will light off something like that in the middle of the fire season – too hot, and it will generate too much heat. All the fire behavior things [are indicating] “No, don’t do it!” But they did it. End of story. My brothers, myself, brothers and sister fire fighters were out there trying to put it out. The thought of their safety and welfare were my main concern.

I’m sorry it [the fire] got away, but maybe you should recalculate when you do these things. When I thought about that, it was like – you don’t do that when that smoke is going to be impacting the tourists (it’s the middle of tourist season!). I just felt that that was bad timing.

That’s what came to my mind. You asked the question.

**

Q-6 Likes and Dislikes of the Effects of the Fire Management Program. Keeping this idea in the foreground for a moment: what elements do you like or not like about fire and smoke management at the park?

I didn’t like about the timing (re Foresta prescribed fire that got away). Everything else – the elements – well, I don’t know. I wasn’t out there. I didn’t see and walk the land...I just didn’t appreciate the timing of it, because of the difficulty of how to contain it, and how to control it....Man, not in the middle of summer, and not when we’ve got bad air already!

**

Q-7 Fire’s Impact on the Ecosystem. Could you briefly share your understanding of fire’s role in the ecosystem in Yosemite NP? How do you feel fire influences the health of the forest within YNP and the surrounding area?

I know man-made ones are not good, but can be good for the replenishing of some of the cones that need fire to germinate.. But I do know that to be able to – like when there’s aspens growing, there needs to be thinning, their needs to be fire control in some of those areas for the brush and overgrowing – and hazardous for homes. I know that fire is really needed, but it just needs to really be publicized – to let people know that that’s what’s happening.

**

It’s needed. It’s needed. It’s the way that that they do it the traditional way – the way the Native Americans did it in the past. They probably have a lot more prettier, cleaned out Park lands. I always believe that people do things because there’s a timing of it – and you’re living in the rhythm of Mother Nature. It’s ok to torch that off. It’s good for the land. It will open it up. And it’s good for the watershed not having the overgrown grasses, dead brush, and overabundance of small trees choking the meadows. It’s good

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for the plants and animals – plants so they can thrive; animals so they can thrive on the plants. It's all connected. I've always felt like "yeah, why don't they do it the Indian way." But then again, back then they didn't have houses, and a bunch of hikers and a bunch of houses and lodges scattered throughout the Park or forests. You know, we're invading the land. So you have to take all that into consideration. Some people like fire, but they don't want smoke. Excuse me? It doesn't work like that. I've always believed that fire was part of the ecosystem. You can't separate it. It's going to happen – whether it is lightning strikes, or accidents, or heaven forbid, arsonists. Fire is a healthy influence on the land within Yosemite National Park and surrounding areas. It's just got to be kept an eye on, not allowed to get too crazy.

**

Q-8 Health Impacts of Fire Management on Personal Life. During the recent past (say, within the past 12-18 months) have you been personally impacted (e.g., experienced discomfort or respiratory ailment, such as asthma) from smoke generated by naturally occurring and/or prescribed burning fires within Yosemite National Park? If so, when did this occur and how serious was the impact?

Nothing. I'm not asthmatic. My kids are not asthmatic. Most of my family members are not. I've never been personally impacted from smoke generated by any of the fires in the area. I could say visually, I didn't like to see smoke coming up; mixed in with the smog in the middle of summer. Well that ain't a good thing! Everybody knows that.

But if it's something that's planned and everything, and it's only for a window of time, then that's ok. But health-wise, it does not impact me.

**

I think when fire – being an asthmatic – when all the fires are burning, even those we're not that close to Yosemite as the other tribes more north, when you get a little filtration of a north wind blowing, it can push it down into the valley – as well as the Sierra, the Sequoia – we're surrounded. And when the Santa Anas are blowing down south, it pushes that smoke up into the valley. And some people here, like myself, do not have two sources of cooling. The only thing I have is a swamp cooler, and that pulls all the smoke in. And so, it's like really hard because once it gets in – like recently, I've been having a tough time breathing. It's constant. Even at nighttime, I can smell it and it feels like somebody standing on my chest. I get headaches – congested just really bad. I'm tired. It's an exertion to get up and actually do things. It's just a constant...I have to watch myself, because if it turns from just a sinus problem and drops down into my chest, it can turn into bronchitis. And if I don't watch it from there, as I'm getting older I am finding that it is harder to catch those faster. Just a month ago, I got that whooping cough. I never had that before. It has to do with my breathing.

They tell me that when it gets really bad, I need to use a mask. But normally if it's that bad, I won't turn the cooler on and I will just suck it up and use my air filters, and keep

my inside very clean. But that's only when I'm home. But it would be good to have information.

So, I know that fire – I fought fires for seven years for the Forest Service in Sequoia and then in Sierra National Forest. And then a season here on the Inyo. I know that fire is needed for pine cones to open up and germinate, and different medicines and different plants need the fire to regerminate itself out. And we use those things – we utilize those things in our foods today, medicines of today gathering purposes. And so, I know that fire is very important; and we've used fire forever – you know, taking care of the areas and burning different areas that needed to be burnt so they could regerminate and we could utilize those things again. And so I know that fire is important.

I don't get any information from Yosemite when they're actually going to do a fire, other than if it was actually going to be like a Section 106 consultation on a process of something happening, where they're going to be ground disturbing or archaeological sites that are revealed. Usually I find out [that there's smoke in the air] by smell. I can smell it, or I can see the discoloration. Dirk Charley from the Sierra National Forest (he's the tribal liaison, and he's a Dunlap Indian) has been excellent about providing me notification on fires. And then when I get it, I kick it to our reception office and tell them "please post" so that people know where these fires are happening.

**

Q-9 Sensitivity to Smoke. (Only asked of interviewees who have been personally affected by smoke) How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?

I have to work. I'm the only one in my house. I have two filters in my house that – as long as I keep the windows closed and the air is cool inside – I can filter my air with those iozon breathers. I have a big one in the living room and one in my bedroom. But if it's a hot day, I've got to have the window open for the cooler to push through. So, there goes all my clean air...

I wanted to look into to purchasing an actual central air system, because then if I needed to in the summer – and there were fires – I could actually turn that on and it would filter through and push the air in my house (circulate that air). And that's air that's good air. That would be a lot better than opening the windows or pulling the swamp air in, when you have all that smoke.

**

When it got too uncomfortable – to the point where it was impacting my breathing, and my ability to perform safely, I got out of the smoke, or I used available methods to get good air [put my bandana over my mouth].

**

Q-10 Your Vision of the Future & Proposed Actions. As you reflect upon your responses to Q-5 through Q-9: do you have any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies, related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.

Utilize similar practices and techniques that the US Forest Service employs.

**

I know that fire is really needed, but it just needs to really be publicized – to let people know that that’s what’s happening – maybe coordinated with Yosemite and with the Forest Service so they [prescribed fires] don’t occur all at once. Maybe they can coordinate a little bit.

I don’t know if they have fires in the winters – if they plan to have fires in the winters for some areas.

**

Q-11 Specific Actions. What specific actions would you like to see to move the Fire Management Program from where it is now to where you would like it to be in the future? What role do you see the Fire Management Program playing in such actions? Please be as specific as possible.

I think educational programs like “tell me what a prescribed fire is?” would be very beneficial for the public, or our schools. Or, to do what tribal organizations and groups have requested regarding education.

Some people don’t understand the concept of prescribed fire. I have heard questions like, “what’s this aerial ignition device? What are you talking about? Dropping napalm out there, or some type of jelly gas.” The people who were asking about this were alarmed. I think that it’s ok to slow it down and explain it to people like that. You know, questions like, “why are you utilizing that method anyway?” It would give us a chance to explain that it’s for safety’s sake. Being a former Hot Shot, I’ve had my share of utilizing drip torches. You put your best and most competent people, who have the endurance and a good understanding of fire behavior to be a lighter. That’s what I did. And I really enjoyed it. And I knew that if you light it this way with the wind’s going that way, it would just take off and you’d be safe. You work safely and effectively as a team and get the job done right.

**

I think in the future it would be really good to really notify tribes. Maybe just to give them that courtesy of what’s happening with fires. And you know, I’d like to see a lot of the traditional fire (the way it was done way back) – how they actually had fires done –

rather than just going out and burning. I know! They don't want to have tribal people there to actually have the fire, but they could do the start of that fire. Invite your tribal people in. Because that was the thing that the tribes did – was take care of their area. And to have that come back. I know they did one project one time where they did ask for people to come. And then the next year (I think it was) they took it away, because they thought it was too dangerous. I would like to see traditional fire indices taken into account again.

What the Forest Services does, is they have what they call "SOPAs" that are mailed to me, and they have a listing of what the projects are, and where they're at, and if they're completed. And then we have our quarterly meetings. And then those SOPAs are brought up. It will list all the things that are happening, along with the person to contact and their number. And if there is anything of concern, we can call and say "please, we need information on this" and then we get it and review it. And then we have our meeting. And Tribal Council makes their comments. I don't think the Park Service does that. You can ask Dirk about that...

I think something like that with Yosemite would be good. Because then, whoever it's going to can view that. And before you have your meeting you make that call and say "Could you please bring more information about this. We have a concern." And so, that's brought to the table.

**

Q-12 Inaction. What would be your concerns if what you proposed is not acted upon?

I'm going to educate them anyway! I can make recommendations, but usually the two Forest Service organization staffs I work with are more than happy to provide the necessary fire management technical expertise to help explain fire management process and techniques in fire management activities.

**

The downside would be people not having a care about it. The politics can get in the way. That's the big thing. Things need to be kept really neutral. And of course the finances would be a big problem right there.

**

Q-13 Personal Commitment and Responsibility. How do you see yourself personally involved in bringing about your suggested changes?

If there's anything I can do to help – get that AD crew going. I know Tribal Council is much for the youth, and have wonderful ideas to put on the table. There are a lot of people here that would. All the guys that I went and fought fires with. There are all kinds of people that could help. And if there was anything that I could do that would

help, I would do it. I would go; I would meet; I would write the letter up and have Council sign it and tell them all about it. And try to push for it.

As a tribal relations liaison, I will continue to share information via tribal forum meetings.

Q-14 Interest in Public Participation. Would you be interested in participating in facilitated dialogues with Fire Management Program staff and other interested people concerning fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park and the surrounding area? If so, do you have any suggestions regarding how you would like such dialogues to be organized and facilitated?

I'm not one for boasting on a person, but Dirk (he is the Native Lead on the Sequoia and Sierra National Forest) has done really intensive work. He formed (I don't know if he did it himself) the Tribal Forums. Now in the Tribal Forums, you have law enforcement comes, the archaeologist comes, the botanist comes – I don't know about the geologist, if there's any projects in that concern. I didn't see any fire crews there – but that's a good structure to kind of follow. And if that was kind of formed, you would have maybe – once a year – have that kind of a format where these people. Now, don't just bring a bunch of information and say "here's this and here's this." No! I want to hear and see what you can show me. You know, show me in a power point, and I can see it and I can understand it better. I don't know about other people, but me – I'm a visual person. I've got to see it, and then I understand it. And I can relay it.

I don't care if it's a two-day meeting (at the most). At Nellis Air Force Base (part of our traditional homeland as well) they pay us to go there. They feed us. They get us a room. They put us up. And we go and we sit there all day. And the person brings their books (whatever they have) that they've done a study on each; example: archaeological project that has been done. It's in a book format. And it's a part that's put up on a power point, and talked about. They tell us what they did ("here's my document") and then, at the end of the meeting, everybody will leave except the sixteen tribes that have come together. And they will sit there. And there's one liaison – and it's a Tribal member – and they'll say "ok, do you guys have any concerns? Do you have anything you want to see? Is there something that you would like for this to happen?" And this is just done with all of the Tribal people. Then that liaison will go and he'll leave the room, and he'll sit with the liaison from Nellis Air Base. They'll sit together. And he'll say "well these are what our concerns were. This is what we would like this next year." [This meeting] was just a one-day thing. Five minutes to talk on this, and five minutes on that. "No!" we said. "That's not right! We would like a two-day. We'd like to have more in-depth documents, and understand it better." And they said "ok." So they took it to the liaison from Nellis Air Base, and then the next year we heard (this year) it went to two days. We're going to actually have a good meeting where we can actually talk...And I think that's a really

good – and it tells us about things that are happening. And if there are any projects where they need a monitor, they actually have a certain amount of people (like say on a list of maybe eight people) and those eight people will be called, and they will go and do the projects with them when they are chosen, and paid to assist giving them a native tribal member, elder or other.

Now, that's a good way of working together! It not only lets that Tribe's people know, but those people go and let the Council know, and report what they've done.

There are some good formats out there. And I think Yosemite would be really good about doing that. Jeanette (Yosemite's Native Rep) has been great. She's done a lot of work. And what she has put together has been great. I really like. But I'd like to see more documents come along with that – from the people who are doing those projects. Have them come in.

**

Yes. I would like to do such a presentation, provided I could have some tribal experts with me (i.e., tribal leaders who are knowledgeable about fire management), to share and utilize their traditional cultural knowledge.

**

Q-15 Interest in Personal Dialogue with Fire Management Program Personnel.

Would you be interested in having someone from the Fire Management Program contact you to discuss your concerns and ideas?

Yes.

**

Q-16 Receiving more information. Would you be interested in receiving more detailed information describing the Park's current guidelines governing decision-making? If you are interested, please note that only your name and telephone number (and not your responses to these questions) will be provided to Fire Management Program personnel.

Definitely! It would be good to know about the fires that are happening, or emergencies, because a lot of our [tribal] people travel through to either gather or to get to social gatherings with the west side Tribes as they also come to the East for events and gathering purposes. We are very well connected to the tribes on the other side. And so if it's a visit, or a pow wow, we're always going through. It would be good to have news about what's happening – about if there is a fire going through. And people who are really bad asthmatics or have other problems or issues would have that ability to be able to...

**

Yes.

**

Q-17 If **\$10 million dollars** were to become available for use within the Yosemite region and you were the person able to decide just how those funds would be used, how would you spend them? While your priority might focus exclusively on Yosemite’s fire management program, please don’t feel limited in your response.

What I would do is – I know that Tribal Council (one of the members) had talked about this before – is actually having...when I went to go fight fires with this AD crew (and the AD crew was all Native Americans), they took us over there. I was 18 years old. I didn’t know anything about fires. I just knew I wanted to get out of here! And so I signed up to go fight fires. I mean, I was running seven miles a day, getting in shape, and dropping trees, thinning projects you know...So, not only would that money crew a program, but it would create a program for Natives. And maybe open a door where more of them can apply to go into the system, or something else.

You know, to use that money in the Park, but as an AD crew to perform something. Dirk’s dad was my supervisor. He was an ex-marine and he had a hot-shot crew (21 man crew). The AD crew was great! It brought people from Tule River, it brought us from Bishop, and it gave us some opportunity for travel; it gave us opportunity to fight fires. It was excellent for learning. It was a tough job, but I really enjoyed it. And I think having something like that with the Yosemite...to help our youth before they go down another path. We need to create something where kids can go (where young people can go) and actually be taught in that process that “this was and is our homeland. Let’s protect it. This is all we have left now.” Who better to protect it, than Us.

**

I would hire Native American youth crews, and do things like timber stand improvement (TSI), fuels reduction, and keep it local. We need to take care of our forests! I would provide leadership and hire more crews to provide employment in the mountains – jobs, jobs, jobs! And, I would be inclusive of all local communities / work force in potential employment opportunities.

**

Q-18 Additional Comments. Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you'd like to add?

We really are blessed where we live. Granted, all the Federal agencies have land-locked us in. But because of their land-locking us in, we still have a great amount...a vast amount...of open land where we can still go out and collect pine nuts, and medicines, and flower seeds. We still have that. So that's really awesome that we have that. And I don't know how to do all of it, but I'm learning as it goes. It's really important, you know.

**

2010 Interview Guide

Participant Name:

Date and Time:

E-Mail Address:

Telephone Number:

Q-1 Relationship to Yosemite National Park. I'd like to begin by asking you to describe your "connection" to Yosemite National Park (and the Fire Management Program, if possible)

Q-2 Sources of Information for Fire Management Activities and Events. What are your preferred sources of information for learning about Fire Management Program activities and events? Why are these sources preferred?

Q-3 Your Understanding of Fire Management's Decision-Making Process. Could you please briefly describe your understanding of how Fire Management decisions are arrived at within Yosemite National Park?

Q-4 Impact of Media Releases. If you heard about a smoke event through the media (for example, via media release): what information would influence your decision to visit Yosemite National Park or to stay away? Please elaborate.

Q-5 Fire and Smoke Management Assessment. When you think about fire and smoke management as currently practiced within Yosemite National Park, what immediately comes to mind?

Q-6 Likes and Dislikes of the Effects of the Fire Management Program. Keeping this idea in the foreground for a moment: what elements do you like or not like about fire and smoke management at the park?

Q-7 Fire's Impact on the Ecosystem. Could you briefly share your understanding of fire's role in the ecosystem in Yosemite NP? How do you feel fire influences the health of the forest within YNP and the surrounding area?

Q-8 Health Impacts of Fire Management on Personal Life. During the recent past (say, within the past 12-18 months) have you been personally impacted (e.g., experienced discomfort or respiratory ailment, such as asthma) from smoke generated by naturally occurring and/or prescribed burning fires within Yosemite National Park? If so, when did this occur and how serious was the impact?

Q-9 Sensitivity to Smoke. (Only asked of interviewees who have been personally affected by smoke) How long (if at all) were you able to tolerate the smoke before taking action to do something about it? What did you do?

Q-10 Your Vision of the Future & Proposed Actions. As you reflect upon your responses to Q-5 through Q-9: do you have any general suggestions, recommendations or strategies, related to fire and smoke management that you feel Yosemite NP should adopt? If so, please elaborate.

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Q-18 Additional Comments. Are there any other comments about fire and smoke management in Yosemite National Park you'd like to add?

Thank you for responding to these questions! As soon as your responses have been entered onto the computer, a copy will be sent to you for review and revision.

The Paperwork Reduction Act requires approval of all federal government surveys by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This interview has been approved under this Act.

***Additional Information Provided upon Request.**

OMB Approval number: *OMB#1024-0224 (NPS# 09-006)*
Expiration Date: *3/10/2011*
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16 U.S.C. 1a-7 authorizes collection of this information. This information will be used by park managers to better serve the public. Response to this request is voluntary. No action may be taken against you for refusing to supply the information requested. The permanent data will not have your telephone number recorded and will be anonymous.

You may direct comments on the number of minutes required to respond, or on any other aspect of this survey to:

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