

# Lava Beds

National Monument

National Park Service

## Prescribed Burn, North of Schonchin Butte, Fall 1995

The smoke and fire seen in the vicinity of Schonchin Butte has been intentionally set by the Lava Beds fire crew.

### What Was That?!

Upon first glance, the previous statement may seem absurd. *Why*, especially in the state of California where recent fires have raged out of control, would anyone, *especially firefighters*, set a fire?

### Always Dead Out!

For many years at Lava Beds and other national parks and forests, any and all fires have been immediately attacked and suppressed, while at the same time providing for the safety of all persons in the direct vicinity. This may seem like the only reasonable way to handle a wildfire, but instead, such activities have had dire, and unintended, consequences.

### Future Benefits

The fire that you see here is a carefully planned prescribed fire, ignited with the intention of preventing future fires from burning too hot, and possibly harming life and property. Many plants, insects, and trees have evolved alongside fire for countless centuries before Europeans, or even Native Americans, arrived on the North American continent. Plants and grasses thrive in the wake of fire, as essential nutrients are returned to, and actually create, soils. Of course, wildlife such as pronghorn antelope and mule deer benefit from the bounty of new growth produced by fire.

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## **Opportunists**

The western juniper, once occurring only in certain parts of the Lava Beds ecosystem, has spread over the landscape, shading out other plants and grasses. As you look out across the land, you see more junipers than the first settlers in the area probably did. Naturally occurring fires kept them in check. Without fire, many trees and plants become what fire managers term decadent, in that dead limbs and branches accumulate without restraint. Branches, dead grasses, and pine needles begin to pile up in large quantities. This accumulation of dead materials is what fuels the uncontrollable infernos which destroy all life and property in their paths.

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## **Calculated Risks**

To reduce the amount of burnable materials, or fuels, the Lava Beds fire management plan calls for prescribed burns under specific conditions. We take into account wind, temperature, humidity, and weather forecasts before we set out to burn the 1300 acres north of Schonchin Butte. All the personnel involved have been expertly trained and briefed on all facets of the operation. Our goal is to ignite and then control the fire while providing for the safety of all life and property. It is important to remember that all fire is to a certain extent unpredictable by nature, but we take all precautions necessary to minimize the risk of a prescribed fire escaping our holding lines.

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**By igniting a controlled fire, we plan to minimize the risk of a large wildfire, and provide a more natural habitat and landscape.**

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