



<b>Subject:</b> Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves		<b>Policy No.</b> AFFES:FM:2:12, PAM 7.02	<b>New</b> <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Compiled by – Branch</b> Aviation, Forest Fire and Emergency Services Branch; Natural Heritage, Lands and Protected Spaces Branch	<b>Section</b> Forest Fire Management Section; Parks & Protected Areas Policy Section	<b>Date Issued</b> November 29, 2010	
<b>Replaces Directive Title</b> Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves	<b>Number</b> FM:2:12, PM 11.03.03, PL 3.03.09	<b>Dated</b> June 25, 2004	<b># Pages</b> 1 of 4
<b>Application</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Provincial Parks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conservation Reserves <input type="checkbox"/> ANSI			

**PURPOSE**

This policy provides direction for fire management in provincial parks and conservation reserves.

**INTRODUCTION**

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) administers Ontario’s provincial parks through Ontario Parks, and conservation reserves through the OMNR district offices.

Many of Ontario’s ecosystems are adapted to disturbance by fire for renewal and ecological health. Lack of fire disturbance in the last century has resulted in ecosystem conditions that do not represent the forest, savannah, or grassland conditions before modern intervention. Shifts in species composition, accumulations of biomass, insect infestations, poor regeneration, and degradation of wildlife habitat are examples of changes that have been documented.

Long term fire suppression can also produce significant accumulations of biomass that function as fuels. Fires in flammable, but often altered, ecosystems may now come with increased risk of intense fire behaviour that can threaten lives, property, neighbouring lands, and some natural and cultural features.

Fire is an important ecosystem process, fundamental to restoring and maintaining the ecological integrity of Ontario’s natural spaces. Natural fire regimes contribute to ecological integrity through maintaining a shifting mosaic of healthy vegetation patches.

Ontario has adopted ecological representation as a method to help conserve biological diversity – the variety of life. Its fundamental principle is that protected areas should include representative examples of the known native biodiversity within ecologically defined regions. Ontario aims to include the best representative examples of its natural and cultural diversity within its system of protected areas. Many protected areas will not continue to represent the natural heritage they were designed to protect unless they are exposed to fire in the coming decades.

Returning fire to Ontario’s protected areas will be challenging. While the natural role of fire must be accommodated, the need to protect human values remains. Many protected areas have infrastructure, recreational uses, and neighbours that can be negatively affected by fire. The management of fire within protected areas must also consider management activities on adjacent lands.

The safe and effective management of fire in provincial parks and conservation reserves in Ontario requires a firm understanding of fire science and planning, opportunities for public consultation, sound operational delivery, and adaptive management based on continuous learning.

Policy No. AFFES:FM:2:12, PAM 7.02 Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves	Date Issued November 29, 2010	Page 2 of 4
--	----------------------------------	----------------

## DEFINITIONS

**Conservation reserves** are areas regulated under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*. Conservation Reserves protect natural heritage values and prohibit industrial uses while allowing traditional activities to continue.

**Fire management** is the activities concerned with the protection of people, property, and forest areas from wildfire and the use of prescribed fire for the attainment of forest management and land management goals and objectives, all conducted in a manner that considers environmental, social and economic criteria. *Note: For the purposes of this policy, forest areas include other vegetated areas such as prairies, savannahs and tundra.*

**Fire management plan** is a statement of operational policy that addresses management objectives and prescribed actions with respect to fire use and/or response to forest fires in a defined area.

**Fire regime** is the kind of fire activity or patterns of fires that generally characterizes a given area.

**Fire response** is the observation, assessment, suppression, or other influence of fire behaviour such that costs and/or damage are minimized and benefits from the fire are maximized.

**Fire use** is the strategy of maintaining fire as an ecological process or meeting resource management objectives through the application or management of prescribed fire or prescribed burning.

**Forest fire** is any fire that is burning in forested areas, brush, grass, tundra, or other vegetation.

**Prescribed burning** is the knowledgeable application of fire to a specific land area to accomplish predetermined forest management or other land use objectives.

**Prescribed fire** is a forest fire deliberately utilized in a pre-specified area in accordance with a predetermined burning prescription to achieve preset resource management objectives.

**Provincial parks** are areas regulated under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*. Provincial parks protect significant natural, cultural and recreational environments while providing opportunities for visitors to participate in recreational and educational activities.

**Wildfire** is an unplanned and unwanted forest fire.

## AUTHORITY

Under the *Forest Fires Prevention Act R.S.O.*, the Minister of Natural Resources is mandated to lead forest fire management efforts on all lands inside the fire region; on Crown lands and lands managed by the OMNR outside the fire region, and; during forest fire emergencies as defined under the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act R.S.O.*

Under the authority of the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act R.S.O.*, the Minister of Natural Resources can direct use, resource management, and fire management activities within provincial parks and conservation reserves.

This policy complements existing forest fire management and protected area policies.

## INTENT AND DIRECTION

### Guiding Principle

Policy No. AFFES:FM:2:12, PAM 7.02 Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves	Date Issued November 29, 2010	Page 3 of 4
--	----------------------------------	----------------

Fire is an essential natural process, fundamental to restoring and maintaining the ecological integrity of Ontario's natural heritage as represented within its provincial parks and conservation reserves.

## Goal

To advance the management of fire in provincial parks and conservation reserves to restore and maintain the ecological integrity of Ontario's natural heritage represented within these areas, while preventing personal injury, value loss, and social disruption associated with forest fires.

## Objectives

- Promote fire management planning for provincial parks and conservation reserves
- Ensure the role of fire is considered and documented in the management direction for provincial parks and conservation reserves
- Ensure clear objectives for fire use and fire response are developed to prevent personal injury, value loss, and social disruption associated with fires, and to meet ecological and resource stewardship objectives

## APPLICATION AND RESPONSIBILITY

### Application

This policy applies to provincial parks and conservation reserves in Ontario.

Fire management direction will be developed and approved in accordance with the *Environmental Assessment Act* and the Fire Management Planning Guideline for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves.

The Fire Management Planning Guideline for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves directs the process of fire management planning which includes:

1. Considering and documenting the role of fire and preliminary fire management objectives during management planning;
2. Incorporating fire management direction within relevant protected area planning documents, and;
3. Preparing fire management plans where appropriate.

Fire management direction for provincial parks and conservation reserves may be provided within the following planning documents:

- Management plans and statements, which identify site-level management policies aimed at maintaining or enhancing the achievement of the objectives of the protected areas system
- Resource stewardship plans, which guide the operational delivery of certain resource stewardship activities and projects
- Fire management plans, which specifically address objectives and prescribed actions with respect to fire response and/or fire use over a period of time

In the absence of fire management direction developed and approved consistent with this policy, fire management will be carried out in accordance with the *Forest Fire Management Strategy for Ontario*.

Prescribed burn plans are operational plans prepared for particular prescribed burning operations, and are not to be considered fire management plans. Prescribed burn plans will be completed and approved in accordance with the Prescribed Burning Operations Policy. Prescribed burns must be consistent with objectives established for the provincial park or conservation reserve.

## Responsibility

Policy No. AFFES:FM:2:12, PAM 7.02 Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves	Date Issued November 29, 2010	Page 4 of 4
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Communication between protected area stewards, district staff, fire managers and others is essential for the development and implementation of sound fire management planning.

The role of fire and preliminary fire management objectives and options will be considered and documented for provincial parks and conservation reserves during management planning in accordance with the Fire Management Planning Guideline for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves and the Ontario Protected Areas Planning Manual.

Those responsible for developing the planning documents listed in the Applications section above will ensure that fire management direction is prepared in consultation with local fire management staff and district staff. Once approved, a copy of these planning documents will be provided to the local Fire Management Headquarters.

If a fire management plan is prepared for a provincial park, the Park Superintendent will co-ordinate its development. If a fire management plan is prepared for a conservation reserve, the Area Supervisor will co-ordinate its development. These personnel will ensure that appropriate OMNR staff is assigned to plan development, and initiate contact with the local Fire Management Supervisor.

The local Fire Management Supervisor will contact the Regional Fire Program Manager, who will assign appropriate OMNR fire management staff to participate in the development of the fire management plan.

Fire management plans that amend protected area management direction must be approved by the Minister. Otherwise, the Park Zone Manager and the Regional Fire Program Manager are responsible for the review and approval of fire management plans for provincial parks; the District Manager and Regional Fire Program Manager are responsible for the review and approval of fire management plans for conservation reserves.

## **LEGAL REFERENCES**

Ontario, S.O. 1990. *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, 1990. Chapter E.9

Ontario. S.O. 1990. *Forest Fires Prevention Act*, 1990. Chapter F.24

Ontario. S.O. 2006. *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*, 2006, c.12

## **OTHER REFERENCES**

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2004. *Forest Fire Management Strategy for Ontario*. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Queen's Printer for Ontario, Toronto. 64 pp.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2008. *Prescribed Burning Operations Policy (FM:2:10)*. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Aviation and Forest Fire Management Branch, Ontario.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2009. *Ontario Protected Areas Planning Manual*. Peterborough. Queen's Printer for Ontario. 50pp.

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 2010 (draft). *Fire Management Planning Guideline for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves*. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Ontario.