



To: Board of Directors
From: Steve Leighton, Fire Chief
Date: February 16, 2022
Subject: Correspondence regarding burn restrictions with Daniel Canfield,
Sierra District Superintendent, California Department of Parks and Recreation

At the Board's request, this is an informational item to discuss the correspondence regarding burn restrictions with Daniel Canfield, Sierra District Superintendent, California Department of Parks and Recreation.



Meeks Bay Fire Protection District

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Steve Leighton, CHIEF

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:
Edward I. Miller
Korie Kromydas
Jennifer Lemke
Louie Fielding

October 15, 2021

Armando Quintero, Director
California State Parks & Recreation
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296

Director Quintero,

On behalf of the Meeks Bay Fire Protection District Board of Directors I am writing to formally request that California State Parks align campfire restrictions with the CALFIRE designated fire restriction and declaration. This request is aligned with changes in Fire Season, fire behavior, and catastrophic wildland fires that have impacted the entire State of California, and a good part of the Western U.S.

We have three State Parks, (Ed Z'Berg Sugar Pine Point, D.L. Bliss, and Emerald Bay) within our District as well as State Recreation Areas. In the past, we have requested that State Parks staff enact fire restrictions to be more consistent with our local ordinance. Our ordinance only allows natural gas or propane BBQ and pellet grills during fire season. Fire Season is defined as the CALFIRE designated open burning suspension that usually occurs around May or June each year. The absence of your agency's restrictions has caused our constituents much consternation when they can easily see campfires in our local State Parks from their homes when the CALFIRE and local ban is in effect. In various forums they have requested our District ask that State Parks enact a campfire ban like our own District's. This summer, when our community was shrouded in smoke with AQI numbers above 600, smoke from campfires in the Park exacerbated the already unhealthy conditions.

State Parks staff have responded to our request that the rationale for not enacting campfire restrictions earlier in the year is related to the fact that the Park is a "hosted environment where Park staff can monitor or extinguish escaped campfires and that the campsites have been cleared of vegetation and fires are contained in a commercial campfire ring".



Meeks Bay Fire Protection District

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Unfortunately this was proven to not always be the case, as this summer a campfire at General Creek Campground jumped a fire ring at an unattended campsite and ignited a nearby pile of firewood. Two campers walking through the Park spotted the blaze and screamed for help as they attempted to extinguish the fire by kicking dirt onto it. A video of the event was posted on several social media platforms, causing a great deal of concern for the community, and negative media exposure for the Park. (The video is available to you upon request).

We consider the Parks in our District an asset to our community. Residents and visitors have great affection for these beautiful facilities and have always considered them to be good neighbors. Comments on social media, and to our personnel indicate somewhat of a negative feeling being germinated as a result of the considerable delay in the Parks enacting burn restrictions this summer

After witnessing recent fire seasons, it is our belief that campfires during the CALFIRE declared fire season are counterintuitive, irresponsible, and not aligned with the effects of climate change and destructive fire behavior.

Please consider this letter as a request to change your Agency's directives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Edward I. Miller".

Edward I. Miller
Board President
Meeks Bay Fire Protection District



January 5, 2022

Meeks Bay Fire Protection District
Edward I Miller, Board President
PO Box 5879
Tahoe City CA 96145

Dear Mr. Miller,

Your letter dated October 15, 2021, to California Department of Parks and Recreation Director Armando Quintero has been referred to me for response.

Thank you for your input and recommendations regarding the California Department of Parks and Recreation (CDPR) campfire policies. While it is important for CDPR to be able to employ adaptive management strategies for park-specific needs and issues, I believe there is more opportunity for CDPR campfire policies in the Sierra region to align with state and local fire designations/restrictions.

CDPR has the statutory responsibility of designating when and where campfires can be allowed safely in California State Parks. This determination is being made on a daily basis by on-the-ground public safety staff with first-hand knowledge of current conditions. Things like weather conditions, public safety staffing levels, and campground occupancy levels are part of the calculus used to determine if and when campfires can be allowed. Restrictions on fire and flame in California State Parks is likewise approached in an iterative fashion based on conditions. The 2021 Summer season was a challenging one in the Sierra region as indicated by the succession of restrictions via Superintendent Orders:

- May 2021: Districtwide Day Use – Wood/Charcoal Prohibition
- June 2021: Districtwide –Red Flag Conditions Wood/Charcoal Prohibition
- July 2021: Malakoff Diggins SHP Chute Hill Campground Fire Prohibition
- August 2021: Plumas-Eureka SP Wood/Charcoal Fire Prohibition
- August 2021: Districtwide Wood/Charcoal Prohibition

Even with these important restrictions, the 2021 campfire program was a great success with no significant incidents. By providing an opportunity for the recreating public to have campfires in a controlled/managed setting, we are reducing the likelihood of illegal/unmanaged campfire activities that can lead to significant issues. Minor mishaps as recounted in your correspondence are indicative of an otherwise safe activity.

As we approach the 2022 camping season, CDPR will take extra steps to align campfire policies with state and local fire designations/restrictions for our Sierra area parks.

Thank you very much for your correspondence and I will plan on joining in the February 16, 2022 meeting of Meeks Bay Fire Protection District to continue the discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Daniel Canfield', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Daniel Canfield
California Department of Parks and Recreation
Sierra District Superintendent
PO Box 266
Tahoma CA. 96142