Restoring Fire in the Trinity Alps
Elements of a strategy for restoring fire to the Alps

1. Change the rules
2. Make it safer
3. Get support
1) Change the rules

Three Forest Plans, three sets of standards. All appear to allow fires to burn, but......

Not clear if all Plans allow Rx fires in Wilderness
Prepare Fire Management Action Plans that will consider and define the circumstances to use in confine, contain, and control suppression strategies.

Use of prescribed fire from planned ignitions to perpetuate natural ecosystems, or to protect adjacent resources, may be undertaken only after Washington Office approval.

Trinity Alps specific:

Fire management is prescriptive, allowing wildfire to perform its ecological function within defined parameters.

Develop a fire management plan which uses planned and unplanned ignition to restore and maintain natural conditions. When implementing this plan, maintaining air quality is an over-riding consideration.
1. Until approval of the Forest Fire Management Action Plan and the individual Wilderness Fire Management Strategies, use “contain” and/or “control” strategies for all wilderness fires.

6. Use prescribed fire to meet at least one of the following objectives:
   (1) to permit lightning fires to play their natural ecological role as nearly as possible: or
   (2) to reduce to an acceptable level the risks and consequences of wildfire within wilderness or escaping from wilderness.
Klamath Forest Plan

All lightning-started fires will be wildland fires managed for resource benefits, unless the fire does not meet the goals and objectives. Permit lightning-caused fires to play their ecological role, as nearly as possible, within the wilderness.

Coordinate fire management actions with forests that share management of the wildernesses.

Reduce to an acceptable level the risks and consequences of a wildland fire within or escaping from the wilderness. This will allow fire to return in a more natural role so managers can select meteorological and fuel situations for future prescribed natural fire.

Wilderness fire policy permits the use of management-lighted fires. Suppression of wildland fire will use appropriate suppression response and the Minimum Impact Suppression Techniques as outlined in the Forest-wide Fire and Fuels Management Standards and Guidelines.
We can work with these standards. But we need to update them and make them consistent when Forest Plans are revised. Why?

WFDSS.
Wildland Fire Decision Support System (WFDSS)
• WFDSS replaced WFSA, WFIP and LTIP, but we don’t care about that. What matters to us is that WFDSS pre-loads Land Management Plan information, including standards and guidelines, for use by fire managers.
So a fire boss on the Klamath portion of the Alps has the following statement to consider as they decide what to do:

“All lightning-started fires will be wildland fires managed for resource benefits, unless the fire does not meet the goals and objectives. Permit lightning-caused fires to play their ecological role, as nearly as possible, within the wilderness.”
This is critical to the thought process a fire manager uses in sizing up a fire. In the absence of good resource information, most fire managers will default to full suppression.

They will often modify that approach when given information indicating that full suppression is not necessary or even harmful.
It is important to note that WFDSS is just a method. The link between Plans and the firefighters is the critical piece. If fire managers know what is in the plan and why it is in there, they may use that knowledge.

If they do not consider a plan that say “its OK to burn”, they may consider the question “Why are you putting people in there?”
When standards tell the fire manager that not doing full suppression is acceptable, the manager is free to base their decision on fire behavior, resources at risk, real stuff. This information allows a manager on the ground to make decisions that reduce risk to firefighters, benefit the resource and save millions of dollars.

No more “We don’t pay you to think”
How do we know this can make a difference?

Caribou burn south of Petersburg
The Willamette (Mt Washington Wilderness), The Sequoia (South Sierra Wilderness) and The Payette (Frank Church-River of no Return Wilderness) all used this method to get acres burned in Wilderness. Let's look at the Payette.
The Payette’s Plan uses fire to achieve management goals in Wilderness and non-wilderness land allocations. 80% of the Forest is available for ‘appropriate management response’. In 2007 they had roughly 100,000 acres in managed fire (wilderness) and 360,000 acres of fire in general forested lands.
They made the decision to monitor wilderness fires, provide structure protection, but did not do full suppression. The wilderness fires were managed for 90 days and cost approximately $5,000,000. The Forest spent an additional $32,000,000 managing large, non-wilderness fires that burned another 360,000 acres.

The Boise N.F. had a similar fire situation that year, but they elected to go with full suppression actions. They spent 67 million dollars and wound up with roughly the same acres burned.
Single year savings are impressive, but the long term affect of having fire management integrated with Plan standards is profound. Using the Krassel Ranger District of the Payette N.F. as an example, in 2006 this Ranger District had 80 wildfires over a short time period in the South Fork Salmon River. Direction for managing these fires was to protect inholdings while allowing the fires to burn together.
2) Make it safer

The District had previously used prescribed fire underburns in pine and mixed conifer. These burns were completed using Forest Plan direction that recognized the value of reintroducing fire to fire dependent ecosystems.
2) Make it safer

The 2006 fires burned 46,000 acres in the Salmon River. Where it had been underburned (non-lethal fire) in previous years, it under-burned again. The fires moved 46,000 acres toward their range of natural variability and by reducing surface and ladder fuels, caused a long term reduction in fire rate of spread, resistance to control and severity.
2) Make it safer

On the Krassel Ranger District of the Payette NF, fire occurrence went from 65 wildfires per year to 7 fires per year after implementation of fire management based on Forest Plan standards.
2) Make it safer

Work in the WUI is critical.

Petersburg pines, Browns, Waterman west, Down river.

Local crews who know the area and are skilled with prescribed fire are a big help – tribal crew, fire use team, etc.
3) Get Support

It may be useful to form a group to:

- Talk about the issues
- Come to an understanding of the options
- Accept what is possible and what is not
- Support the agency in making some changes
The agencies have many difficulties to overcome.

Getting fire back into the system is a steep climb.
If we can work together,
We can get this done