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(PNR)CAE

March 16, 1976

Memorandum

To: Files

From: Acting Regional Director, Pacific Northwest Region

Subject: Environmental analysis for the proposed ban on wood fires within Craters of the Moon National Monument.

In 1974, it was felt that some action was needed to protect the limited number of trees in Craters of the Moon National Monument. The trees were being damaged and/or destroyed by visitors seeking wood for campfires. During the 1975 visitor season, fires were allowed only in the campground and only with wood collected from outside the Monument boundaries. However, the trees are still slowly being eliminated even with strict enforcement of the regulation prohibiting use of standing wood for fires.

Two basic alternatives are now being considered: Continue the status quo condition whereby wood fires within the Monument are discouraged but are not legally restricted. Prohibit the use of wood fires anywhere within Monument boundaries except at the Sunset Crater Group Campground with wood marked and provided by Monument personnel for fires confined in fireplaces provided for visitor use, and at the Lava Flow Campground Amphitheater in conjunction with evening campfire programs when the fire is under the control and supervision of Monument personnel.

Within the heavily visited loop drive area of the Monument, some 6,000 trees were felled in the 1960s in a mistletoe control effort. Thus, in an area where trees were already sparse, they were further reduced in number. One of the control zones included the Monument's only developed campground which now contains approximately 40 to 50 living and dead limber pines. Other than on the north facing slopes of the cinder cones and a few other locations where snow conditions favor the trees, the limber pine is a scattered occupant of the sage-grass community of the Monument. Trees are even more limited in the wilderness than in the developed northern section of the Park.

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The first alternative provides for no changes in the present enforcement practices regarding wood fires. These practices include informing the backcountry user that wood fires are not allowed in the wilderness and informing campground users that wood fires are allowed only in designated fireplaces with wood collected from outside the Monument boundaries. This alternative would result in a further reduction in the number of trees. In the wilderness, this alternative could even result in the possible elimination of the ghostly pines whose presence add an all important element to the wilderness atmosphere.

The second alternative would totally ban all wood fires in the Monument except in the north unit group campground and at evening campfire programs in the amphitheater. It would tend to preserve the limited number of limber pines now existing within the Monument, especially in the campground area. The trees have aesthetic value, and they provide shade for visitors during the hot summers.

Therefore, it is concluded that wood fires will be banned in Craters of the Moon National Monument except at the Sunset Crater Group Campground and the Lava Flow Campground Amphitheater. In conjunction with implementation of this special regulation, existing concrete fireplaces in the campground will be replaced with aluminum charcoal grills mounted on standpipes. This action will not disturb vegetation or soils; the grills will not interfere with normal traffic patterns established by visitors in the past.

No sites on, or eligible for, the "National Register of Historic Places" occur in the Monument. An archeological survey of the Monument was completed in 1966, and no significant archeological sites or properties were located.

The banning of wood fires within the boundaries of Craters of the Moon National Monument is not a major federal action significantly affecting the quality of the human environment and does not involve controversy. Therefore, no environmental assessment will be prepared, and we will proceed to implement the special regulation.

Edward J. Kurtz

cc:

Superintendent, Craters of the Moon

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Draft approved by Clark, Rouse, Callison, and Kurtz