

Mark areas of confusion and show evidence of a close reading. Write comments & questions in the margins.

# Wildfires Ravage Yosemite Park

Sep 2, 2013 By Deepa Gopal

A huge wildfire has been sweeping across California's majestic Sierra Nevada Mountains, threatening the giant Sequoia Redwoods in Yosemite National Park and putting the city of San Francisco on alert. The flames are dangerously close to the Hetch Hetchy reservoir that supplies water and power to San Francisco.

Firefighters have had some success in controlling the spread of fire which has already grown to become the fourth largest in California history. They are being assisted by an unmanned drone flown by the National Guard, to detect flare-ups in this vast, remote and rugged terrain.

## Natural Or Man-Made?



Areas affected by the Rim Fire in Yosemite

*Wildfire* is any unwanted, unplanned, damaging fire occurring in forest, shrub or grasslands. Wildfires are started by lightning or by people. To burn, wildfires require the right conditions - the fire triangle of fuel, oxygen and heat. The Yosemite region has been experiencing extreme temperatures and drought-like conditions for years, making conditions ripe.

In many parts of the world natural fires (mostly due to lightning) have shaped much of the landscape. There has also been a long tradition of fires started intentionally by people for clearing land, logging or clearing natural vegetation for agriculture. Then, there are visitors to national parks, and smokers who accidentally set fires and arsonists who do so intentionally. Officials believe the Yosemite Rim fire was man-made, and are yet to find the exact source.

## Notes

### *Yosemite National Park*

*Yosemite National Park sits in central-east California, along the Sierra Nevada mountain range that extends through California and Nevada. Formed from ancient glaciers that eroded the landscape, the park is known for its sheer granite cliffs and spectacular waterfalls, not to mention the centuries-old giant Sequoia Redwood trees.*

*A crown jewel among National Parks, Yosemite has the distinction of being the first area set aside by the U.S Congress in 1864 and signed by then President Abraham Lincoln.*

## Can Wildfires Be Beneficial?



Areas charred by earlier wildfires act as a natural barrier

Not all wildfires are bad. Forest fires can have several beneficial effects. Charcoal enriches soil. Some plant species flourish after fires -- the cones of the jack pine tree, for instance, will not release their seeds unless exposed to intense heat. Sequoia or Douglas firs grows best in open sunlight areas, such as those cleared by fire. Many pine, flower and grass seeds flourish best just after a moderate fire has swept through, releasing nutrients that allow these fire adapted plants to grow.

Additionally, many animals benefit from areas that have burned. Some species, such as the red-cockaded woodpecker, thrive in forests that depend on fire. Fires also clear away dead and dying underbrush, which help restore ecosystems to good health. For these reasons, the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture often allows fires, especially when started by lightning, to burn in carefully monitored areas.

The Yosemite Rim fire, however, has been killing everything in its path, and has affected the routes of migratory deer and displaced birds such as the endangered Great Gray Owl. The forest will take years to recover. But for now, the brave men and women of the fire department are putting their lives on the line, protecting property and lives.

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Write a response to this question:

Often fires are set on purpose or by careless handling of cigarettes or campfires. Should those responsible have to help pay for the damages caused by their actions? Why or why not? Use facts in this article to support your opinion.