



What are?

PARTS OF A WILDFIRE

There are many parts of a wildfire and wildland firefighters use specific terminology to describe each part.

Fuel, weather, and topography – components of fire behavior – influences how fires spread and ultimately what becomes the head, flank, or back of the fire.

The parts of a wildfire described below are the same whether the fire is human or lightning caused. Let's start at the beginning...

Ignition Point (also referred to as the Point of Origin)

The ignition point is the location within the fire perimeter where ignition first occurred and combustion was sustained.

Perimeter

The perimeter is the entire outside edge or boundary of a fire or burned area.

Head

The head is the fastest moving portion of a fire which is normally burning with the wind and/or up slope. Depending on the fuel and its arrangement, the head typically has the greatest flame length, flame depth, and rate of spread.

Heading Fire

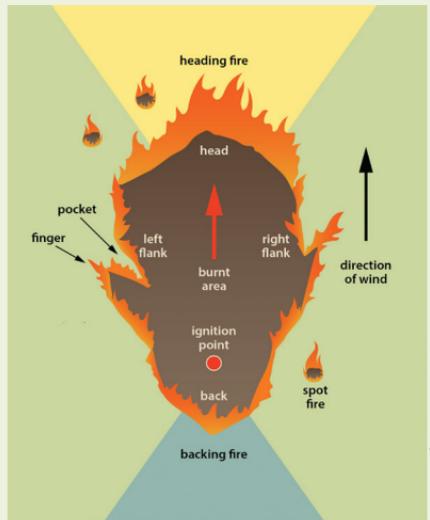
A heading fire is fire spreading, or ignited to spread, with the wind.

Back (also referred to as the Base or Heel)

The back is the portion opposite the head and slowest moving part of the fire with the shortest flame lengths.

Backing Fire

A backing fire is fire spreading, or ignited to spread, into (against) the wind or downslope.



Flanks

The flanks are roughly parallel to the main direction of spread. Flanks have less alignment with the wind than the head thereby reducing the intensity and rate of spread of those parts.

Finger(s)

Fingers are long narrow extensions of a fire that project from the main body of the fire.

Pocket(s) (also referred to as Bays)

Pockets are unburned indentations in the fire edge formed by fingers or slow burning areas.

Unburned island(s) (not pictured)

Unburned islands are areas where fuels were not combusted within the fire perimeter.

Spot Fire(s)

Spot fires are ignited outside the perimeter of the main fire by lofted embers. Firefighters often refer to this as spotting and may occur miles in advance of the flaming front.

For more information:

[Fire Science Core Curriculum](#). 2017. OSU Extension Service, EM 9172: 197p.

[NWCG Glossary A-Z](#). Date accessed, July 1, 2019.

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