

## **Jan van Wagtendonk Collection**

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Yosemite National Park Archives

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<http://www.nps.gov/yose/historyculture/collections.htm>

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## Descriptive Summary

**Title:** Jan van Wagtendonk Collection

**Dates:** 1923-2007

**Collection Number:** YCN: 1015 (233112)

**Creator/Collector:**

**Extent:** 26.85 LF (50\_manuscript boxes, 2852 slides in 7 slide boxes, 3 oversized boxes, 15 prints, 48 negatives, and 16 oversized maps)

Online items available 

[https://voro.cdlib.org/user-pdf-dav/yosnpa/Jan%20Van%20Wagtendonk%20Collection\\_%20Finding%20Aid\\_2014.pdf](https://voro.cdlib.org/user-pdf-dav/yosnpa/Jan%20Van%20Wagtendonk%20Collection_%20Finding%20Aid_2014.pdf)

**Repository:** Yosemite National Park Archives

El Portal, California 95318

**Abstract:** The Jan van Wagtendonk Collection consists of the documents and records created and received by Dr. van Wagtendonk during his tenure as a Yosemite National Park research scientist from 1972-2009. These documents contain information relating to research and scholarship undertaken by Dr. van Wagtendonk in areas of fire ecology, geographic information systems, and social carrying capacity as well as information regarding broader park programs and planning activities in which he participated including wilderness management, fire management, Yosemite Master Plan development, and scientific research initiatives. The collection contains correspondence, scientific data, manuscripts, draft and finalized plans, reports, scholarly reference materials, maps, floppy disks, and photographs (slides, negatives, and prints).

**Language of Material:** English

### Access

No restrictions.

### Preferred Citation

Jan van Wagtendonk Collection. Yosemite National Park Archives

### Acquisition Information

The collection was given to the Yosemite National Park Archives by Jan van Wagtendonk following his retirement and was accessioned on August 8, 2011.

### Biography/Administrative History

Jan Willem van Wagtendonk was born on February 21, 1940 in Palo Alto, California, the second child of Willem Johann and Rolina Jantina van Wagtendonk. At the age of six, he moved with his family to Bloomington, Indiana, where he attended primary and secondary school and began his study of forestry at Purdue University. After undertaking summer seasonal work as a firefighter and smokejumper for the United States Forest Service, he decided to transfer to Oregon State University where he received a B.S in forest management in 1963. From 1963-1967, he served as an officer in the 101st Airborne Division and as an advisor to the Vietnamese army. In 1967, he began graduate work at the University of California, Berkeley under Dr. Harold Biswell and received his M.S. in range management in 1968 and his Ph.D. in wildland resource science with a specialty in fire ecology in 1972. His mentor Dr. Harold Biswell played a pivotal role in shifting a century of National Park Service fire suppression policy. Dr. Biswell conducted studies in the 1960s and 1970s at Whitaker's Forest just outside of Kings Canyon National Park that demonstrated the vital ecological role that fire played within giant sequoia groves. Following his observations, Kings Canyon and Sequoia instituted a new fire policy of allowing natural fires to burn and conducted prescribed burns in areas long subject to fire suppression. Interest in Biswell's work extended to Yosemite National Park, and Robert Barbee, the natural resources manager for the park, consulted with Biswell about how fire might be reintroduced into Yosemite. For his dissertation topic, Dr. van Wagtendonk conducted experiments in Yosemite National Park designed to develop quantitative burning prescriptions based on Dr. Biswell's work. The observations recorded in his dissertation still form the basis of the Yosemite fire management program today. In 1972, he was hired by the National Park Service to serve as research biologist for Yosemite National Park. During his tenure as a park researcher, Dr. van Wagtendonk's studies focused on social carrying capacity, geographic information systems, and fire ecology. In 1972, he was appointed the wilderness manager for Yosemite, where he wrote the park's first Backcountry Use and Operations Plan and helped develop a trailhead use limit system called QUOTA to alleviate problems of overcrowding in the backcountry. He served as Yosemite's representative at the Denver Service Center during the development of the 1974 Yosemite Master Plan, and later served as a consultant for the development of the 1980 Master Plan. He continued work on prescribed burning and the effects of fire suppression that provided major contributions to Yosemite's fire management program. In *Blazing Heritage*, Hal Rothman observes that 'by the late 1970s, van Wagtendonk's work had laid the basis for a revolution in the park's planning. His papers outlined the achievements and the consequences of fire management, showing how Yosemite had measured its prescriptions for fire and how science changed the parameters of such planning.'

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Along with his work in fire ecology and social carrying capacity, Dr. van Wagtendonk helped develop a geographic information and management system to combine preexisting maps and digital information about the park into one database. He also served on a number of federal panels relating to fire policy and management and as president of the Association of Fire Ecology. In 1994, he became a research forester at the Yosemite Field Station as part of the newly appointed National Biological Survey (NBS). The NBS was formed in 1993 under Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt with the aim of conducting an extensive survey of potentially threatened biota in the United States. In 1996, the NBS was transferred into the United States Geological Survey and renamed the Biological Resources Division (BRD). Dr. van Wagtendonk continued his work at the Yosemite Field Station under the Western Ecological Research Center (WERC), one of 18 centers of the BRD, until his retirement in 2009.

**Scope and Content of Collection**

The Jan van Wagtendonk Collection is arranged into nine series: Series I: Publications and Scholarly Activities, Series II: Scientific Data, Series III: Management Plan Development, Series IV: Reference Materials, Series V: Correspondence, Series VI: Merced Canyon Committee documents, Series VII: Administrative Records, Series VIII: Slides and Series IX: Map of Trail Segment and Campsite Map - Wilderness Area Simulation Model. Series I-VII are arranged alphabetically by folder title. Due to a lack of recognizable original order, alphabetical arrangement was imposed on the collection. Series VIII retains its original order in order to preserve context.

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