

# Davis County III Fuels Treatment

Uinta-Wasatch-Cache NF, 2009

A Success Story

By Eric M. LaMalfa

Large, contiguous areas of dense Gambel oak/bigtooth maple vegetation occur along the Wasatch Front in Davis County. This fuel type presents serious difficulties and hazards when controlling wildfires adjacent to the urban interface. The lack of natural fuel breaks and steep side slopes severely limits the capability to insert ground-based suppression resources in mid-slope positions safely. These limitations force more reliance on air tanker and helicopter resources, which add considerable cost to fire suppression efforts. In the last century, fire suppression activities along the Wasatch Front have interrupted the natural fire regime in the oak/maple vegetation type. Prior to European settlement, the natural fire return intervals ranged from 35 to 100 years. Using the Fire Regime Condition Class (FRCC) analysis method, the forest staff concluded that this watershed falls into a class 2 fire regime condition class rating. This means that the watershed is moderately departed from reference conditions.

The need for this project was illustrated by the Farmington and Centerville wildfires during the summer of 2003, both of which threatened residences in these communities. Hazardous fuel loads within the project area range from 25 to 35 tons per acre and canopy heights in many places are 20 to 30 feet tall.



Figure 1. Pile burning near the USFS/private property boundary (Photo: Ryan Witter).

The Davis III project treated approximately 128 acres of oak brush fuels in the Davis County Fuels project area. Unit three (88 acres) was treated by hand-thinning and piling cut materials along a ridge line to break up the continuity of over-mature oak brush vegetation. Piles were later burned during favorable conditions for smoke dispersion. In addition, 40 acres of additional hand-thinning was re-treated on USFS lands situated west of Unit 3 and east of the private property and associated residences. Treatments were focused on creating a fuelbreak along the private – public land boundary. The treatment was intended to improve the effectiveness of future aerial retardant as well as improving ingress and egress for ground resources near the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). The fuelbreak will serve as a contingency line during future prescribed fire or wildfire management operations.

Forest Service staff coordinated the planning and implementation of these treatments with local citizen trails advocates (the Farmington Trails Committee), local city fire department, and the Utah Division of Natural Resources. By participating in the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP), the fuels staff built a relationship with citizens in the community affected by wildfire. This new relationship has paved the way for additional NEPA analysis using the Healthy Forests Restoration Act Environmental Analysis (HFRA EA) to examine a proposal to use prescribed fire in the Davis Creek area.

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