

Forest Service Reduces Fire Hazard in the Tahoe National Forest

Fuel Reduction Treatment to Slow Spread of Wildfires

"Our fuel reduction priorities are to clear out brush, thin over crowded stands of trees, and develop fuel breaks on National Forest System land near homes and communities. We can't eliminate the possibility of major fires, but through our fuels work, we hope to change the characteristics of the fire; to slow its spread, provide safer areas for firefighters to fight the fire as well as provide greater protection around the private homes near communities," stated Rich Johnson, Foresthill District Ranger

Michigan Bluff Fuelbreak

With Proposition 204 funds, a 1-mile fuel break down slope of the community of Michigan Bluff was constructed on the National Forest. "This was tough work as the manzanita was over 15 feet high in spots. It was a critical project for us to complete in order to slow the spread of a wildfire that could race out of the North Fork of the Middle Fork American River canyon and burn into the community," stated Rich Johnson.



Looking south toward the 15 foot high manzanita while standing in the Michigan Bluff fuel break.



Looking north at the same point in the fuel break toward nearby homes. The fuel break will change the behavior of a wildfire by slowing it down, giving firefighters a greater chance of saving the homes.



Many Types of Treatment Being Used to Treat 1,000 Acre Project near Foresthill/Michigan Bluff

East of Foresthill and southwest of Michigan Bluff, an area with very dense, flammable vegetation is being treated using different types of vegetation removal.

In one 20-acre parcel along the Gorman Ranch Road, members of the Foresthill Hand Crew cut and piled brush and small trees this past summer. In between storms this spring they burned the piles. According to Rich Herrera, previous superintendent of the crew, they worked aggressively but safely. "We have been able to accomplish a lot of burning. To ready an area to burn, we constructed a line around each pile by pulling away the top layer of the pine needles and debris on the forest floor leaving the moist soil/duff underneath. This low impact fire line helped protect the soil yet was effective in reducing the chance of these burns getting away from us," he stated. Other treatments planned for the 1,000-acre area will involve the use of a masticator similar to a giant lawnmower that mows down the brush and small trees and prescribed underburns.



Foresthill Hand Crew members Jason Beesley and Eric Husmann burn piles after vegetation was thinned and cut by hand.



Fuel Break Along Foresthill Divide Road

In another part of the Ranger District, a shaded fuel break 10 miles long and 300-400 feet wide has been constructed along the Foresthill Divide Road. The purpose of the fuel break is to reduce the speed and spread of an approaching fire and to cause it to drop from the crowns of the trees to the ground. This gives firefighters a chance to contain it along the Divide and to keep it from crossing into the North Fork American River Canyon. The characteristics throughout the area before the work was done consisted of deep pine needles on the ground, dense brush and shrubs and tightly grouped trees. Now the trees have been thinned, the brush removed and the needles reduced by a combination of treatments including the thinning, pruning, hand piling, and underburning.



Forest Supervisor Steve Eubanks, District Ranger Rich Johnson, and previous Fire Management Officer Joel Lane review the Foresthill Divide Fuel Break

Lots of Work Accomplished, But Much More to Go; Cooperation the Key

Ranger Johnson concluded, "I am pleased with the amount of work we have been able to accomplish, but there is still a long way to go. The cooperation among the private land owners, other agencies and the Forest Service enables us to stretch taxpayer's dollars and accomplish more than we could do alone."



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