



Revitalizing Forests and Protecting Communities in the Lassen National Forest

By Margalit Shetreat-Klein (Partnership and Collaboration Resource & Landowner Assistance Resource Assistant) with Todd Sloat (North Zone Shared Stewardship Advisor)

December 21st, 2023

Urgent land management challenges like extreme wildfires, severe drought and invasive species do not recognize borders or boundary lines. Through the Shared Stewardship Program, the U.S. Forest Service, Pacific Southwest Region is coming together with Tribal governments, as well as states and other partners, to address these challenges and explore opportunities to improve forest health and resiliency across management jurisdictions. One of these partnerships is with CAL FIRE and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to support the Shared Stewardship (S2) Advisors. The S2 Advisors work with the U.S. Forest Service and partners across the state to identify collaborative opportunities and implement cross-boundary forest health and resiliency projects.

The natural beauty of a forested landscape, an abundance of recreation opportunities, and the sights and sounds of wildlife are just a few of the perks that communities located near woodlands can enjoy. However, along with these benefits comes a significant hazard. Communities located in the Wildland Urban Interface – areas where human development meets or intermingles with wildland vegetation – must deal with an increased risk of wildfire.

Indeed, in recent decades, Northern California communities local to the Burney Creek and Hat Creek watersheds have experienced increased risks of high-severity wildfire. These risks stem largely from the forest health challenges in nearby woodlands, which are characterized by dense, overstocked stands and trees dying from drought, insects, and disease, leading to a landscape with heavy fuel loads. Additionally, since the area is a relatively low-elevation pine forest, it's more vulnerable to climate change effects. Protecting the nearby communities in the northeastern corner of Shasta County, California – Burney, Johnson Park, Old Station, Fall River Mills, McArthur, and Cassel – became a priority for the Burney-Hat Creek Community Forest and Watershed Group, a community-based collaborative dedicated to improving social, environmental, and economic conditions in the Burney and Hat Creek watersheds.

Through the collaborative efforts of the Burney-Hat Creek Community Forest and Watershed Group, the [Crossroads](#) Project and the Manzanita Chutes Project (part of the [North 49 Forest Health Recovery Project](#)) were developed. Located on the [Lassen National Forest](#), these two high-priority Wildland Urban Interface and Forest Health projects aimed to defend the local communities and revitalize the landscapes through improving forest health, increasing fire resiliency, reducing fuels, and mitigating insect mortality.

“Crossroads is a very important project because it is basically surrounding the Four Corners area, which is a major through route for any of the traffic that comes through the Lassen Area,” explained Katelyn Suderman, District Silviculturist on the Lassen National Forest’s Hat Creek Ranger District.

“Manzanita Chutes is... right off of a major highway going through here, and it butts up against the Dixie Fire footprint. So getting that treated is a major part of making sure that if another fire comes through, it doesn’t lead into reburning the whole Dixie area and any of the green we have left standing.”



Figure 1: Pre-treatment site conditions at Crossroads Project

The [Fall River Resource Conservation District](#) secured funding for both the Crossroads and Manzanita Chutes Projects from CAL FIRE's [California Climate Investments](#) fund as part of their Forest Health Grant Program. The project layout and implementation phase for Crossroads was led by Cascade Resource Consultants, a local forest and natural resource management company, in partnership with the Hat Creek Ranger District.

In the summer of 2023, the Fall River Resource Conservation District and Hat Creek Ranger District completed the stewardship timber sale phase on the Crossroads Project, with the goal of reducing fuel loading through mechanical thinning from densely overstocked pine and mixed oak woodland stands. The accomplishments from this project are particularly visible where State Routes 299 and 89 intersect, as well as in various locations around McArthur-Burney Falls State Park and Lake Britton. Numerous trees on these landscapes had died or were in the process of succumbing to drought, insects, and disease. After removal of these trees, 1,200 log loads were harvested and sold to a local sawmill, and 787 chip van loads (about 13,000 bone-dry-tons) were hauled to a local bioenergy facility to create clean power.

The work didn't stop there, though. Forest Service fuels staff continue to work to reduce the remaining fuels in the project area. Additionally, the [Mule Deer Foundation](#) has committed \$2 million of [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law/Inflation Reduction Act](#) funding to the Crossroads Project via their Keystone Agreement with the Washington Office of the Forest Service. The funds will be used to complete mastication – or mulching of trees and vegetation – on approximately 2,400 acres in the Crossroads project area to increase wildlife forage and further reduce fuel loading.

As for the Manzanita Chutes Project, the combination of logging and mastication in these overstocked areas greatly improved forest health and reduced heavy fuel loads. 1,480 acres have been treated near Lassen Volcanic National Park as of the summer of 2023. Areas with substantial brush and dense pine stands (approximately 743 acres) were masticated before sawlog removal. Fuels treatments on the landscape are still in progress – in early December 2023, the Fall River Resource Conservation District began a cut/skid/deck plantation thinning project to remove smaller trees from the project area.

To maximize community benefits of the Crossroads and Manzanita Chutes Projects, contracts were awarded to three separate local Licensed Timber Operators. Logging and chipping for the Crossroads Projects was carried out by Tubit Enterprises; and mastication and sawlog removal for the Manzanita Chutes Project was conducted by Thompson Land Management and Del Logging, respectively.



Figure 2: Post-treatment site conditions at Crossroads Project

The partnerships involved in these projects were instrumental in creating the necessary capacity to achieve successful wildfire resiliency and forest health treatment results for these projects. In addition to the implementation and contracting work done by the partners, the Fall River Resource Conservation District helped fulfill the requirements of the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA), allowing the project to move forward at a greatly increased pace.

Continued partnerships are necessary to maintain the results of these projects. Ongoing, regular maintenance can be made possible through the increased capacity, planning efforts, and implementation provided by working with partners. The long-term goal for these landscapes is to restore them to fire-adapted, healthy forests by returning frequent prescribed fire to the area, maintaining large tree overstories with wildlife habitat, and keeping fuel levels down through thinning treatments, especially in those areas closest to the communities. Suderman emphasized that it's essential to remain engaged and involved on the landscapes even after the initial projects are complete.

"I think it's important for the public to know that what they're seeing in Crossroads and Manzanita Chutes isn't the final product," Suderman said.

"We're still working out there, and we can show off what we've done so far – but there's a lot more we're planning on doing and expanding outside of those project areas. It's an ongoing process, but the partners have been super helpful in getting everything done, and we owe a lot of the work to their help."