

Aerial Hydromulching Questions and Answers

What is hydromulch?

The hydromulch consists of wood mulch, recycled paper, water and a tackifier, which is guar gum based and binds the ingredients together. Green dye helps the pilots monitor application, but the hydromulch will turn gray after a few days on the ground.

How does hydromulching help the burned area recover?

The hydromulch hardens a few days after application and binds to the soil on the hillside to minimize soil movement. The mixture traps moisture and creates an environment in which seeds can sprout. Eventually, the new vegetation takes over its natural role in stabilizing the soil.

Where are the treatment areas?

The Forest Service will treat 636 acres in four different areas: Angora Ridge Road, Angora Lakes, behind the high school, and a small unit off Highway 50 and North Upper Truckee Road.

Is it safe for humans and animals?

Yes, the Forest Service selected this mixture because it is all organic and extremely safe, for people, animals and the environment. Guar gum may sound exotic, but it's actually a plant substance commonly used as thickener in ice cream and in other foods. The hydromulch is a wet product that will not drift, and the contractor will not fly when winds are too high to allow pilots to deposit the hydromulch with accuracy. In addition, the Forest Service has established a 300 foot buffer around the urban interface.

Does the hydromulch contain seeds and fertilizer?

While hydromulch often contains seeds and fertilizer, the Forest Service has made the decision not to add these to our mix. There are viable seeds on the hill slope that we expect will sprout. We are not using fertilizer because it could contribute to an excess of nutrients in the lake, potentially harming water quality.

Where can I watch the operations?

Forest Service staff will be available to explain the process and answer questions at two locations. The intersection of Sawmill Pond Road and Lake Tahoe Boulevard provides a view of operations from a distance. A closer look will be available from the intersection of Mt. Rainier Road and Lake Tahoe Boulevard. These sites will not be staffed if planes are not flying, but interpretive signs will be available. Staffing hours for the viewing locations will be:

Wednesday, September 12th through Friday, September 14th :

Morning: 9 a.m. until 11 a.m.

Afternoon: 3 p.m. until 6 p.m.

Saturdays and Sundays through the end of the project:

11 a.m. until 3 p.m.

The Forest Service asks that observers park in a way that does not obstruct traffic and be considerate of the privacy of local residents.

Will the operations disrupt traffic in the neighborhoods?

Traffic delays, most on the order of ten to fifteen minutes, will occur on Angora Ridge Road while the contractor is working on the adjacent unit.

What are the flight hours?

Flight times will be from 8:00 a.m. until dark (not later than 8:00 pm.), to minimize noise disturbance in nearby neighborhoods. To the extent possible, work around the unit behind the high school will be completed on weekends.

Why can't I go into the area that's been hydromulched?

Walking or biking on the hydromulch will reduce the effectiveness of the treatment. Once the hydromulch is disturbed, water can get underneath and undermine it or winds can cause it to flake. The first snowfall of a foot or more will protect the hydromulch until the spring melt, when it will begin to biodegrade and vegetation will take its place. Forest protection officers will patrol the area and issue citations if necessary.

What else has the Forest Service done to rehabilitate the burned area?

The Forest Service Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) Team has applied wood straw and rice straw to 125 acres to stabilize soil on urban lots and near the wild-urban interface. Crews have located and pulled more than 5500 noxious weeds on urban lots and completed noxious weed surveys for the General Forest. They have seeded more than 15 acres of urban lots for weed control and installed erosion control devices throughout the burned area. Hazard tree removal on urban lots began this week and soon will begin in the General Forest.