

## Audio Tour, Stop 11, Feretti Road

Feretti road is a great example of how the Forest Service partners with other agencies to keep communities safe from fire. SWIFT, the South West InterFace Team, helps to create fire adapted communities by strategically locating fuel breaks to protect homes in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Fuel treatments buy firefighters a margin of safety. Punching in dozer line is faster and easier when heavy fuels have already been removed and holding a fire is easier where fuels are lighter as well. Backfires can also be conducted off of these treated areas. Once a fuel break has been created, it is important to maintain that safety zone as fire danger resumes as fuel stacks up overtime. Homeowners can help by removing cured grass annually.

The 15 mile Rim Truck Fuel Break is a great example of the work the Forest Service has done in conjunction with CalFire. The growth and severity of the Rim Fire was lessened by this fuel break and that provided a measure of safety both for firefighters as well as residents living in Pine Mt. Lake, Groveland and Big Oak Flat. As the fire rapidly approached mid-slope mountain towns, Forest Service crews back-burned off of the fuel break to widen that margin of safety for those living nearby. In some cases, dozer line was established within existing fuel breaks to hold back the fire.

The Peach Growers fuel treatment area is another good example. Lighter fuels allowed firefighters to easily construct dozer line near some recreation cabins and to burn out the area, starving the fire of potential fuel. Although high intensity fire behavior pushed through the untreated fuels on the downhill side of a nearby road, the intensity of the fire front was reduced overall. This 742 acre project, completed by the Forest Service, had a significant impact on the area's safety.

Previous mechanical thinning and prescribed burns in the Bear Mt. area also resulted in reduced severity from the Rim Fire. Though flames swept through the area, it burned surface fuels with low flame heights instead of racing through the tops of the trees.

This begs the question: Are all fires necessarily bad? The answer to that seems to come down to timing and planning. Wildland fires are unplanned and often occur during the hottest, driest months. Combine those conditions with steep slopes and a severe drought and these mega-fires can defy the best of fire suppression forces. Prescribed burns and thinning operations are planned and conducted under set weather conditions. Smaller areas of land are ignited individually and control lines are established in advance. Fuels near the fireline are removed to ensure that radiant heat and spot fires don't cross the line.

In places where fuel breaks don't exist, firefighters may choose to fight a fire by lighting several with their drip torch. The Quinn residence was singlehandedly saved by a firefighter who lit spot fires near the cabin to lessen fuels before the main front of the Rim Fire hit.

By day 4 of the fire, I found myself in the Quilty Creek area. I was there, along with Engine 14, sizing up the historic Quinn Ranch home. The plan was to burn out around the cedar bark home that night but within a half an hour spot fires were raining down all around the area. That's how fast-paced the fire was. As the fire crested over the ridge, the radiant heat was terrific.

Due to the quickly changing scenario, my original plan was no longer viable and I needed to make a snap decision. Engine 14 had left Quinn Ranch since it appeared the fire would hit Rogge Ranch first.

Gut instincts will make you want to leave an area like the one I stood in, but then all of my training as a Firing Boss kicked in. I had an escape route and I just knew if I could get enough fire on the ground in small patches, I could lessen the intensity of the blaze and possibly save the house.

Our fire prevention technician was successful in saving the cabin but as you can see a variety of firefighting tactics may be applied to reach the same goal. It's important to remember that is not always safe to engage a fire directly, under extreme drought conditions, especially if other environmental stressors exist such as heavy fuel loads, low fuel moisture levels and an unstable atmosphere.

Our number one goal is to keep the public and our firefighters safe. No structure, natural or cultural resource is worth the loss of a single human life. Where possible, we do take heroic steps to help save homes in the wildland urban interface but the area must be safe enough for us to engage. That means local residents must help by doing their annual fuel clearance from around their homes.

The Forest Service is working very hard to create fire resilient forests within California. We recognize that resilient forests help to create resilient communities. Restoring the landscape is going to take time, money and dedication. Approximately six to nine million acres of National Forest lands need to be restored in the next 15 to 20 years to outpace the current rate of degradation experienced on the landscape. With shrinking budgets, we are all called to form cross-boundary relationships with those entities that stand to benefit from improved forest and watershed health.

By joining forces with government agencies, tribes, private property owners and those who insure them, and the industries typically impacted by fire, such as water and electric utilities, we all stand to benefit. Accelerated fuels treatments can also boost local economies by supporting the timber industry and biomass plants.

Breaking the destructive cycle of fire will not happen overnight, nor will it occur in a vacuum, but we are taking important steps on the Stanislaus to do just that. Restoration work is important. Not only is it a core value for the Forest Service but locally it is helping us to return health and vibrancy to the Stanislaus National Forest.

The worth of our Forest is not so much in the value of our timber, nor strictly in the water we provide, but it is in the health and resiliency of the landscapes and watersheds we all enjoy.