



# Mitigating Potential Disaster in Anchorage

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*An expanded trail right of way improved safety by limited fire ignitions and improving fire access for brush rigs.*

Homes that are located within and adjacent to forested lands harmed by the spruce bark beetle increase the hazard of wildland fire on the Anchorage hillside. A wildland fire that ignites homes in these areas may likely convert to a structural fire disaster if the homes become the fire's primary fuel source. To mitigate a potential disaster, the Anchorage Fire Department (AFD), the State of Alaska Division of Forestry and the U.S. Forest Service State & Private Forestry organization are working in partnership to limit the impacts of a wildland fire through Firewise education and treatment of forest fuels. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act provided grant funds for four separate fuels reduction projects in the Anchorage area.

The first such project is located at Cross Park. This 10-acre park, which is a treasure to its neighbors and the community, contains six acres of mixed hardwood forest. During the spruce bark beetle epidemic, many trees were killed. To reduce the fire danger from accumulated live and dead vegetation at the wildland urban interface, treating these six acres supports a Firewise neighborhood in the adjacent Sky Ranch Estates and other neighborhoods along Birch Road. The Pioneer Peak Hotshot crew spent three days cutting the dead trees at Cross Park to reduce its fuel load. The slash piles will be burned this fall.

The second project began in May 2010. With six days to work between fire assignments, the Hotshots undertook the Chester Creek: Karluk to Lake Otis Parkway Project. Home to the less fortunate, this forested parcel of Municipal park land supports many illegal (homeless) camps and their cook-

ing and warming fires. Due to the dense black spruce, predicted fire behavior presents a significant danger to the homes adjacent to the park. When the Hotshots complete the tree thinning, a mechanized unit will "mulch" the slash in the woods, creating an open stand with little understory.

The first goal was to thin out the black spruce stand in Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) Park land behind the Senior Center. The second goal was to thin out sections of black spruce along the Chester Creek Trail between Karluk and Lake Otis Parkway. The cutting portion is approximately 60% completed. A Rayco mower will be used to mulch all of the slash in the woods behind the Senior Center and chip the slash along the trail. Thinning the black spruce in this area deters fire ignitions by juveniles, vagrants and illegal campers while also limiting fire spread through a reduction in fuel loading.

The third project is the Far North Bicentennial Park—Old Rony TrailWatch Project. The Far North Bicentennial Park, which spans 3,626 acres in the heart of the Municipality of Anchorage, hosts trails, wildlife, anadromous streams and a rich suite of recreational opportunities. Due to its great expanse, fighting brush fires in the park often requires aerial support. Along with its partner, TrailWatch, the AFD increased the right-of-way on a main trail into the park allowing brush rigs to access more of the forested acres. A fire occurred here in 2009.

A section of park trail between the BLM Campbell Tract and Tudor Road was thinned by TrailWatch volunteers in June. This project was coordinated through the MOA Parks and Recreation department. The AFD supported the project by contracting to chip the slash along the trail, thereby reducing the fire danger and improving fire access for AFD brush rigs. This project is 50% complete. Expanded trail right-of-way provides for improved safety by limiting fire ignitions and improving fire access for AFD brush rigs. A complementary effort along the same trail system was completed within the BLM Campbell Tract by additional volunteer effort and the BLM's chipper.

The final project in the ARRA fuels project bundle is the Russian Jack Springs North-TrailWatch Project. In 2009, AFD partnered with TrailWatch to

treat a long segment of the trail system through Russian Jack Springs Park. In the northern half of the park, they thinned and chipped black spruce trees along the trail system.

They expanded the trail right-of-way to improve safety by limiting fire ignitions and improving fire access for AFD brush rigs. The work was completed in June 2010. AFD also treat-

ed an additional section to improve the safety around the soccer fields and playground. Thinning trees and pruning the lower limbs deters fire activity by children and vagrants.