Pacific Crest Trail Suppression Repair Guidelines

Purpose:

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) is congressionally designated under the National Trails System Act and is a recreation resource that is required under law to provide for unparalleled recreation and inspiring views. The Forest Service is responsible for ensuring that land managers and partners along the 2,650-miles trail understand the special status of the PCT landscape and how the law, regulation and policies require special management and protection of the trail. The lands through which the PCT passes are experiencing more frequent and intense fire regimes, which places PCT infrastructure and its associated ecological resources and scenery at a greater risk of impact and destruction. To support active fire management and suppression efforts, this document is intended to provide guidelines for suppression repair actions when the PCT and its surrounding lands have been impacted through suppression efforts.

Like designated wilderness, the importance and long-term impacts to this resource should be considered in the planning, implementation, and repair of suppression actions. The scenery along the Trail (including foreground) is a critical value of this recreational resource. Suppression actions should be minimized and repaired when lands along the trail are impacted to mitigate for the trail's viewshed.

Trail Specifications:

Trail Tread: 18-24 inches
Trail Corridor Clearing: 6ft - 8ft wide and 10ft high
Trail Viewshed: Lands that are visible when standing directly on trail. Because of the high level of detail visible in the immediate foreground and foreground, suppression repair activities within these zones are subject to strict standards to minimize visual impacts to repair and preserve the visual integrity of the National Scenic Trail. Repairs may need to be further assessed in the foreground and middleground depending on the visual impacts from suppression activities.

Distance zones are identified in the scenery management system as:

- **Immediate Foreground** – up to 300 ft. from observer
- **Foreground** – up to 1/2 mile from observer
- **Middleground** – 1/2 to horizon from the observer

Repair Guidelines:

Because of the importance and sensitivity of the PCT and its associated visual resources, it is highly recommended that a REAF with wilderness or trails skillset is assigned to the suppression and repair efforts.

Preface: All heavy equipment and mechanized use in designated Wilderness require Regional pre-approval. Motorized use on or along the PCT requires Agency Administrator approval.

Heavy Equipment incursions across, following or directly on the PCT:

1. Utilize excavator with thumb to repair dozer lines crossing on, along, or perpendicular to the PCT
    a. Recontour natural slope and install drainage when needed on dozer lines
        i. Install water bars or chunking on dozer line as stated in suppression repair plan specifications per maximum slope and distance between each drainage feature
        ii. Install chunking where waterbars would result in drainage onto the PCT
    b. Pull large cut and pushed vegetation throughout the dozer lines & over trail corridor
        i. Place stumps and cut ends facing away for trail
        ii. Attempt to achieve at least 50% ground cover
        iii. Pull back vegetation onto line in an unorderly and random fashion

iv. Ensure a high standard of naturalizing within the PCT viewshed (immediate foreground – within 300 feet of PCT.)

c. Minimize travel on the PCT where it was not previously disturbed by heavy equipment

2. Utilize hand crew to rebuild the PCT trail & reestablish corridor after heavy equipment repairs are complete
    a. **If trail reconstruction requires significant trail stabilization, rock work, or is at a steep grade, request a Trails/Wilderness Resource Advisor to be on site during the repair**
    b. Rehabilitate trail tread to be 18-24 inches wide
    c. Clear trail corridor to 6-8ft
    d. Knock down berms & install drainage as needed, out slope reconstructed compacted trail tread to ensure proper drainage
    e. Compact trail tread
    f. Within trail viewshed (see definition in Trail Specifications) lop & scatter vegetation where trees & shrubs are not pulled back from heavy equipment.
        i. Cut ends should be placed away from the trail
        ii. Pull back vegetation onto line in an unorderly and random fashion
        iii. Do not line the trail with parallel rocks or logs, creates drainage issue long term
        iv. Disguise scrape marks left by dozer as best as possible
        v. Disperse/hide cut rounds off trail if there is a large concentration of trees across the trail corridor
3. Request Conservation Corps Crew hitches to complete trail repairs and touch up work to be completed when fire is contained
    a. Install PCT trail blazes to redefine trail corridor

Heavy Equipment incursions at PCT Trailheads or road crossings:

(in addition to above prescriptions)

1. Install barriers to prevent OHV incursions using natural materials
    a. Place rocks or large downed trees surrounding trailhead, where dozer line starts (do not utilize tree species that are highly sought after for firewood)
    b. Chunk ground (2-3ft high depending on soil type)
    c. Lop and scatter vegetation over chunked ground
    d. Avoid installing large berms whenever other options are possible
2. Utilize hand crew to rebuild the PCT trail & reestablish corridor after heavy equipment operations are complete

Handline along or across the PCT:

(in addition to above prescriptions)

1. When PCT is utilized as handline:
    a. Pull back berms, smooth out soil & recontour. Re-establish trail tread to be 18-24 inches wide. If widened beyond 24 inches, pull duff over widened trail section.
    b. If brushing occurred along the Trail:
        i. Within trail viewshed (see definition in Trail Specifications) ensure that repairs maintain a high standard for naturalizing all fire impacts.
        ii. Cut ends should be placed away from the trail
        iii. Place vegetation along trail in an unorderly and random fashion
        iv. Do not line the trail with parallel rocks or logs, creates drainage issue long term
    c. If trees or snags are taken down along the Trail within foreground:

i. Low stump all cuts visible from the trail (recommended <6 inches when possible). Cover cut stump with soil or hide with duff or natural material.
ii. All cuts should be flush to the ground, no bevels or cross hatching.
iii. Minimize cuts along the trail, mimic crosscut saw methods (avoid cutting unnecessary rounds)
iv. Disperse cut rounds out of sight of the trail if there is a large concentration within the trail corridor.

2. Rehabilitate handlines that cross/intersect the PCT:
    a. Pull back berms, smooth out soil & recontour
    b. Disguise the handline so it is not visible to the public
    c. Within trail viewshed (see definition in Trail Specifications) ensure a high standard for disguising the handline by lopping & scattering vegetation (between 100-300ft fully disguise)
        i. Cut ends should be placed away from the trail
        ii. Place vegetation in an unorderly and random fashion
        iii. Do not line the trail with parallel rocks or logs, creates drainage issue long term
        iv. Disperse/hide cut rounds off trail if there is a large concentration of trees across the trail corridor
3. Utilize hand crew to re-establish or restore PCT tread & reestablish corridor after handline repairs are complete

Damage to PCT in designated Wilderness

If the PCT is impacted in designated wilderness, consider these prescriptions in addition to MIST tactics. All heavy equipment and mechanized use in wilderness require Regional approval.

(in addition to above prescriptions)

a) Disguising cut stumps within PCT immediate foreground:
    a. Non-mechanized
        - Low stump all cuts visible from the trail (recommended <6 inches).
        - Cover cut stump with soil and turn cut ends away from soil.
        - Remove rounds as much as possible from view of the trail.
    b. Mechanized use approved
        - Dozer - use talons to rip the top of cut stump to appear like a natural break & run over stump to crush further
        - Excavator – crush and rip stump to appear like a natural break
        - Explosives – shoot stump to naturalize and “fuzz”

Policy References:

Pacific Crest Trail Comprehensive Management Plan (link)

Pacific Crest Trail Foundation Document (link)

PCT Comprehensive Management Plan Appendix C –

Criteria for location, design, signing, and user facilities (pg. 91-110)

"Dimensions: Generally, the trail tread will be from 18 to 24 inches wide. Eighteen inches will be the minimum width at all locations. Twenty-four inches should be the maximum width unless additional width is required for safety. Along a precipice, or hazardous area, the trail should be at least 48 inches wide in order to provide safety to the traveler and allow horses to pass without difficulty. Special trail sections, such as fords through small streams or built-up sections across flat areas, should have usable tread of at least 36 inches wide.

Clearing. As a general rule, all projecting limbs, brush, down logs, debris, and sapling trees will be cleared to a minimum width of 8 feet. If trees larger than 10 inches in diameter cannot be avoided, they shall be cut in order to provide a minimum cleared width of 6 feet. The overhead clearance shall be a minimum of 10 feet above the trail tread... All stumps within the trail clearing width shall be cut flush, as practical, with the ground.

Travelway Clearing" (illustration, pg. 15) shows the clearing dimensions graphically. Clearing, beyond that necessary for adequate room along the trail, may be desirable to provide openings so that the traveler can enjoy a particular scene. These clearings should be planned to give the appearance of a natural opening. Additional clearing width may be needed through areas of high fire hazard, such as the brush fields of southern California and the heavy-forested areas along the trail. Remove "hazard" trees which would endanger trail users."