

Gyrotrac Brushcutters Assist in Hazard Fuels Reduction Big Cypress National Park, Florida National Fire Plan – Fuels Reduction

Using funds provided by the National Fire Plan, the National Park Service at Big Cypress National Preserve was able to purchase two Gyrotrac brushcutters. Since arriving in the park during the fall of 2003, the Gyrotracs have added another dimension to an already successful fire management program. In 2004, Big Cypress proposed cutting brush and non-native trees to reduce the fire hazard on 500 acres along Highway 41, Tamiami Trail in southern Florida.



Aerial view of hazard fuels reduction project in Big Cypress using the Gyrotrac.

By June 2004, 250 acres had been treated by the machines, providing reduced fuel loadings next to a private business, several structures, two Indian villages, as well as the highway. The scheduling of the work was accelerated through the use of a new planning tool, the Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI) Categorical Exclusion.

By using the HFI Categorical Exclusion, the park was able to start working on the project sooner than it could have if it was required to do an Environmental Assessment. The ability to use the HFI Categorical Exclusion arrived at the park about the same time as the Gyrotracs. The staff at Big Cypress estimates that using the HFI Categorical exclusion saved them two to six months of analysis.

As well as reducing hazardous fuels, the Gyrotracs are also accelerating the re-establishment of the coastal prairie that had been invaded by non-native trees and brush. After the Gyrotracs have completed the work, the areas treated will be prescribed burned to reduce the chance of brush re-sprouting and encourage the re-establishment of native grasses.

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