

## Making a Difference Huron Manistee National Forest - Michigan

Historically, the forested lands of Iosco and Alcona Counties in central Michigan have been susceptible to wildland fires. The jack pine fuel type associated with the sandy soils predominant in these counties is considered one of the most volatile and dangerous fuel types in the United States.

In 1911, most of the structures of Oscoda and Au Sable were destroyed when a fire approached from the western jack pine “plains”. Currently, overtime dense stands of young trees and drought have created conditions producing larger-than-normal wildland fires. In addition, more people are living in the forests than in 1911 creating a “wildland urban-interface.”



The River Road Fire was a wake up call for the Huron-Manistee and the community in 1988. The fire threatened the local high school as well as many homes.

The removal of jack pine through commercial harvest and mechanical thinning is necessary to create grassy openings and shaded fuel breaks since the Sand Lake and associated hazardous fuel reduction projects are located in areas with historic high fire occurrence.

The goals of the projects are:

- To expand existing fuel breaks around the Oscoda School complex, industrial park and subdivisions.
- To place projects in areas that had historically high fire occurrences and in areas adjacent to “Communities at Risk” as identified in the National Fire Plan.

Most of the material removed will be chipped and used at wood-burning power plant, reducing the amount of woody debris, called “slash,” left on the forest floor. The fuel breaks

will be maintained by mowing and using prescribed fire.

The Sand Lake Fuels Project is one of 15 pilot projects around the US where the Forest Service has implemented an improved and focused process for completing environmental assessments for priority forest health projects.

The project was selected as an EA pilot project in October 2002 and a decision notice was issued in May 2003. The Forest has expedited the fuels treatment projects more quickly using the improved EA process.

Approximately 800 acres in four areas were selected for mechanical treatment (clearcut and thinning through commercial timber sale and chipping of woody material). No appeals were received; implementation is under way with the first contract issued this fall; the balance of the contracts will be awarded spring 2004.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act and the Healthy Forests Initiative, visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>