

Miles of Piles: Roadside Thinning Piques Curiosity Yosemite National Park, California National Fire Plan – Fuels Reduction

In June 2003, Yosemite fire managers began a project to remove the dangerous build-up of brush and dead or downed trees along the Big Oak Flat Road corridor (Highway 120 inside the park). This project continues into 2005 and now includes the Wawona Road (Highway 41 inside the park). To park fire managers, the “miles of piles” is a successful hazard fuel reduction project.

This mechanical thinning process is one tool used by the National Park Service to reduce heavy accumulation of fuels and, ultimately, help prevent larger fires. In turn, this helps preserve natural and cultural resources and provide for public and firefighter safety. These projects also serve to protect park and community structures from wildfires.

The primary goal of these projects is to reduce fire hazards along major travel routes through the park. In the event of a wildfire, this will help ensure public and firefighter safety. Thinning for removal of hazardous wildland fuels establishes and maintains fuelbreaks and evacuation routes in the event of a wildland fire emergency. It also helps reduce the potential for a large crown fire to spread which could ultimately overrun the road.

Approximately 1,000 acres have been thinned, brushed, and piled by crews. Chainsaws were used to thin areas within 200 feet, on either side, of the Big Oak Flat Road and the Wawona Road. Primarily young conifers and mixed brush (including manzanita and ceanothus) were thinned. Trees six inches diameter at breast height (dbh) have been included in this project.

The roadside thinning project implements the *Final Yosemite Fire Management Plan*. One of the interesting benefits to the project is that it has piqued visitor curiosity. It is one of the most common questions asked in the park right now and provides park employees a great opportunity to educate visitors about the role of fire in the park as well as the effects of fire suppression.

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A crew member from Central Valley Forestry busy creating piles.



Piles on the Big Oak Flat Road (Highway 120) were burned after the first snow in 2003.