

Forest Fuel Reduction and Residential Structure Protection in the Remote Community of Stehekin, Washington North Cascades National Park, Washington National Fire Plan – Fuels Reduction

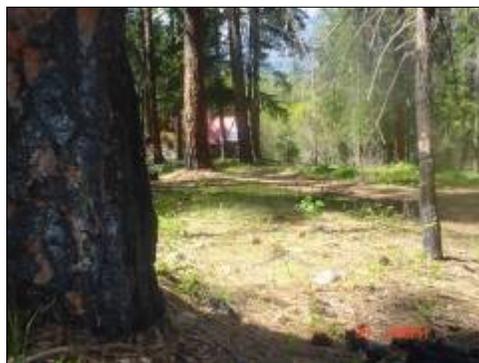
The community of Stehekin, Washington, is located at the remote northern end of Lake Chelan, one of America's largest and deepest lakes. Here in the southernmost part of the North Cascades National Park Service Complex, Stehekin is surrounded by wilderness, high mountain peaks, stunning wildlife, and pristine natural beauty. What makes this land management story so fascinating is not only the impressive landscape and the complex resource management challenge, but also the unique community on the valley floor. Stehekin's rich cultural history descends from pioneers who homesteaded the area several generations ago. The culture they introduced can still be seen and felt against the backdrop of a harsh yet pristine wilderness. To this day, Stehekin remains connected to the modern world only by boat, foot or plane.

In the case of wildfire and forest health, Stehekin is a hotspot for uncontrollable and high intensity wildfire behavior because of many years of fire suppression and disruption of the natural fire cycle. To remedy this hazardous and unhealthy situation, the Park's Fire Management Team has been working with resource managers on an active program throughout the valley to reduce fuels, better protect structures, create healthier habitats, monitor fire effects, and collaborate with residents. Using prescribed fire in conjunction with defensible space operations the Park has been decreasing risks to life, property and resources as well as helping perpetuate the natural and cultural resources for which the national park was established.

One of the forest fuel treatment units now completed is called the Company Creek Unit, comprised of approximately 143 treated acres of mixed conifer forest. The Park's targets for the Company Creek Forest Fuel Reduction Area were met with several small and large diameter thinning and prescribed burn treatments to reduce fuel loadings and provide sunlight and nutrients to plants on the forest floor. While reducing fuels, the Park also provided defensible space structure protection from unexpected wildfire for the



Area treated in the Company Creek Unit of North Cascades National Park.



House within the treated area of the Company Creek Unit.

adjacent private properties. This involved thinning, limbing, brush removal, and pile burning within 200 feet of structures to prevent fire spread through the crowns of the trees.

The Company Creek projects (both prescribed burns and defensible space) connected the Park's Fire Management team with two local residents; Trapper and Roxanne, who have been very involved with the successive phases of the work. At the same time they have been protecting their home through a combination of their own forest fuel reduction and installation of a sprinkler system for their yard, gravity fed from Company Creek. Several pipe fittings provided by the Park Service allow 1 ½" fire hose to attach directly to the water system for use adjacent to their house either for wildfire protection or for use during prescribed burns. Trapper has done his fire protection research finding the latest, greatest and most economical equipment and

sharing that knowledge with the park and other residents. Here is what Trapper and Roxanne have to say about the combined effort:

"In cooperation with the North Cascade Fire Group, we've been able to greatly reduce our home's exposure to forest fire with a modest ongoing effort and at very reasonable cost. The Fire Group provided both direct actions and also consulted with us on our own efforts. The nearby prescribed burn has recovered quickly with attractive ground cover and great animal sightings – grasses, wild flowers, woodpeckers, deer, owls, and even frogs! Working with the Fire Group has been easy and stress-free; we look forward to continued joint efforts to reduce our fire danger."

Trapper and Roxanne's story as well as other great successes in the valley have encouraged and educated other residents about dangerous fire behavior and the local historic fire cycle, which includes frequent low-intensity burns that minimized danger to the community and created a healthy forest.

By combining mechanical thinning and prescribed fire, The North Cascades Fire Management Team will continue to treat fire prone areas in the Stehekin Valley to reduce the chances of a wildfire from threatening its unique cultural history, its natural resources, and the people who visit, live and work there.

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