

National Fire Plan Fuels Reduction Program



Arizona - The adage "less is more" doesn't apply to a lot of things - chocolate and money may come to mind. But some local residents will soon find that "less is more" often does apply to trees.



Cutting down the small trees

Crews working for the Fuels Reduction Program, a local multi agency-landowner collaboration funded by the National Fire Plan, will begin cutting trees after Columbus Day on 10 one-acre lots in Sherwood Forest Estates. The thinning will reduce the risk of wildland fire and improve forest health, according to FRP coordinator Art Matthias.

The bulk of treatment cost is being funded through grants tied to the National Fire Plan with some additional money provided through the county, according to Matthias. Individual landowners are charged \$50 per acre - a price that may increase as actual program expenses are determined - to help defray some of the estimated \$500 to \$800 per acre cost.

Complementing the FRP's planned work on private lands in Sherwood Forest and Parks, the Kaibab National Forest has planned fuels management projects for the surrounding public land under its care. The forest also agreed to open Moonset Pit, one of the Williams Ranger District's cinder pits, to accommodate the slash produced during FRP's treatments. "This program helps people reduce the risk of loss of property and life," said Matthias, in a phone interview from his Coconino County Extension Office. "Also, we know scientifically that thinning will improve the rate of growth in the remaining forest and make it healthier."

Besides Sherwood Forest, FRP also plans to treat private land in the Parks neighborhood. Between the two communities, almost 80 landowners have signed up for the program, totaling more than 300 acres scheduled for thinning.

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"We genuinely appreciate people's willingness to get involved in this important program," said Kevin Boness, district forester for the Arizona State Land Department, the agency responsible for recommending and implementing property treatments for FRP. "The people who have signed up are being proactive in addressing wildland fire risk. That is critical because it is not a matter of "if" but "when" a catastrophic wildland fire will occur."



Cut Branches

The FRP alliance was formed because of the understanding that, in order for wildfire risk reduction to be truly effective in the two communities, both public and private land needed treatment. To ensure that happened, Kaibab National Forest teamed with the land department, the Coconino County Extension Office, the Coconino County Public Works and Emergency Services divisions, Northern Arizona University's Ecological Restoration Institute and the Parks-Bellemont and Sherwood Forest fire departments. Although Matthias said current program funds are already obligated, he is working to secure additional money so more individuals and communities can reap the benefits. "I would encourage people to stay informed, stay tuned and stay interested," Matthias said. "There may be future opportunities for them."

On about 80 of the total acres signed up, trees have been tied with plastic flagging indicating that the land department recommends those trees be cut. It is the landowner who decides which trees go, according to Matthias. He does caution, however, that the more flags people remove, the less protective value the treatments will have. "People want to treat their property, but they also want to maintain the aesthetic qualities, said Matthias. "That is the balance we have to seek." Following work on the 10 Sherwood Forest lots, which should take about a month for cutting and slash removal, the FRP will review its progress and schedule additional property for treatment. Cutting will be done by a Winslow Prison inmate crew working for the land department - an option much cheaper than commercial alternatives, according to Matthias. Slash removal will be contracted out to

private firms that have the equipment necessary for effective disposal. "The 10 Sherwood Forest lots were selected to be treated first because they are representative of all the property we have signed up," Matthias said. "Based on the costs associated with those lots, we should be able to estimate pretty accurately our total cost for all 300 acres." "The real benefit to these communities is the synergy provided by fuels reduction work being done both on their own property and the adjacent National Forest," said Williams District Ranger Susan Skalski. "With that corresponding effort, the benefits will be greatly enhanced." Following some particularly intense fire seasons several years ago, forest officials analyzed lands within forest boundaries and ranked areas based on wildfire risk. Both the Sherwood Forest and Parks communities were considered high-risk areas, according to Skalski.



Cutting a log

For additional information on the National Fire Plan, visit www.fireplan.gov