



Fuels Project near Delta Junction Resumes

BLM's Alaska Fire Service, working with the U.S. Army, is converting a stand of forest from black spruce to hardwoods. The conversion project involves an area about five miles long and 75-150 yards wide, and will protect residential areas near Delta Junction from potential wildfires sparked by training activities on Fort Greely.

Alaska Fire Service and U.S. Army crews worked last summer to hand-thin and remove the spruce component from existing hardwood stands and to thin out spruce in pure spruce stands. They thinned 37 acres, making 630-plus piles that were burned over the winter. Work will resume in March, when a contractor will treat another 88 acres with a shear blade and a hydroax.

The treated area blends with the landscape in a lazy curve design. The work is expected to make the stand less flammable and create a point from which to begin attack on a fire. A three-phase process was designed, including ecosystem manipulation and community involvement. Different mechanical treatments are being applied in other areas to determine which is the most effective and cost efficient. The one that meets the criteria will dictate what happens along the rest of the curve.

The second phase involves community participation. Alaska Fire Service and the army will work with Alaska Division of Forestry and private homeowners to encourage community fire preparedness by stressing homeowner's responsibility in taking the initiative to prepare their houses and property for fire.

The third phase will involve clearance of black spruce stands in a series of polygons that will be used to break up the continuity of the fuels and reduce likelihood of high-intensity crown fires. A detailed assessment will be conducted of wildland fire fuels south of the project.

Once the three phases are completed the project will require occasional maintenance. Hardwood regeneration is expected within the first two years. Any spruce growth will be removed every five years to maintain the hardwood component.

Delta Junction and Fort Greely, located in the Tanana Valley near the confluence of the glacier-fed Delta River and the Clearwater River, have experienced some close calls from wildfires. In addition to the volatile black spruce, which surrounds the communities like a sea, the area is subject to frequent chinook winds from the Alaska Range.

The North Jarvis Stand Conversion Project is one of several joint initiatives that underway to prepare military lands for fire. As the urban-wildland interface continues to grow and as U.S. Army in Alaska expands its mission, managers must think ahead for fire-readiness. The BLM Alaska Fire Service-U.S. Army partnership has allowed them to move forward in this challenge.

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