

Slick Rock Fuelbreak Sequoia National Forest - California

On August 17, the Deep Fire on the Sequoia National Forest was contained at 3,143 acres. Concerns were extremely high about this fire from the time it started on August 12. It threatened a number of communities and had the potential to become very big, and to burn through groves of Giant Sequoia located in the Mountain Home State, the Sequoia National Monument, and in Balch County Park (Tulare County).

Contingency plans were developed to underburn the Giant Sequoia groves if the fire moved past defensive lines established further downslope from the groves. It was a risky strategy, but better than allowing the uncontrolled Deep Fire to move through them. Fortunately, that contingency plan did not have to be used.

The fire was fought under Forest Service-California Department of Forestry unified command. They were successful in keeping the fire relatively small and out of the Sequoia groves through exceptional work by firefighters and by heavily committing resources. At one point almost 2,000 firefighters were working on the fire, along with five airtankers and ten helicopters, including four heavy helitankers. The intensity of the effort was reflected in the cost, estimated at \$6.3 million as of the time of containment, but it was an investment that paid off. Had it not been contained, the firefighting effort would have likely gone on much longer and at a much higher cost.

A key factor in the successful effort was the ability of the Sequoia National Forest to take advantage of several strategic fuel treatments the Forest had done in 1999, 2000, and 2001, with just this situation in mind. The Coffee prescribed burn project of 1999 and 2000, and the Slick Rock thinning/prescribed burn project of 2000 and 2001, which was paid for in part with NFP funds, provided essential strategic points from which firefighters could widen the containment lines that eventually contained the fire. This is an outstanding example of the value of strategically placed fuel reduction projects.

