

Fuel Reduction Treatments Completed in Zion Canyon Zion National Park, Utah National Fire Plan – Fuels Reduction

In October 2004, Zion National Park Fire Management completed a series of wildland urban interface (WUI) fuels treatments in Zion Canyon as part of their ongoing efforts to reduce the risks from wildland fire to park resources. These treatments were developed and funded under the WUI program, in cooperation with the National Fire Plan 2000, the Healthy Forest Initiative, and the Interagency Cohesive Strategy.



A 20-acre fuel reduction treatment in the Pine Creek Residential Area consisted of the mechanical removal of material that could pose a significant fire risk in the event of a wildland fire. The removed material was placed into piles and will be burned later in the season when appropriate weather conditions exist. The Pine Creek Residential Area consists of historic houses that are occupied by both permanent and seasonal employees. The objective of this treatment was to create and maintain a defensible fuel break in and around park infrastructure within the Pine Creek developed area. All residents were notified in advance of the project and the crew worked closely with them to try to accommodate any special needs/desires that they may have, while still achieving the stated objectives of the project and maintaining the historic landscape. Treatments were accomplished so as to minimize damage to resources, while still providing defensible space. This fuels treatment will not only aid the wildland fire crew in their efforts to manage wildland fires, but also the park's structural fire crew in their efforts to protect park buildings.

The park also completed a fuel reduction treatment around the historic Nature Center in Zion Canyon to help protect it from wildland fire. As with the Pine Creek treatments, dead and downed fuels were mechanically removed from the vicinity of the Nature Center and placed into piles for future burning. The fire crew worked closely with the resource management staff to ensure that the cultural integrity of the building was maintained and that impacts were kept to a minimum.

The park is also continuing an exotic plant reduction treatment from 2003 in Zion Canyon. Cheatgrass and Rip-gut Brome, two exotic grass species that have taken the place of native grass species in the last few decades, are now posing a wildland fire risk to park resources. To combat this problem, Fire Management officials have been working closely with Maintenance and Resource Management Divisions to institute treatment methods to lessen the fire risks around structures and provide a safer environment for visitors.

The exotic plant treatment work was done by mechanical methods, using a small tractor with a brush mower attachment. Since park personnel cannot possibly mow the entire canyon floor, they concentrated their efforts along the road corridor, campgrounds and around Zion Lodge and other park structures. Fire Management personnel also used weed-eaters around buildings where a mower cannot access to provide defensible space for firefighters and equipment in case of a wildland fire.



Mowing exotic vegetation in Zion Canyon



Fuel reduction around Pine Creek residences

This series of fuel treatments in Zion National Park are some of several similar treatments planned for the next few years in other areas of the park's interface. They will help to protect park infrastructures and other resources from wildland fires, while also providing safety for both park staff and visitors. The policy of using fuels treatments in the park will help to perpetuate the natural and cultural values for which Zion National Park was established.

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