



Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests Cle Elum Ranger District, Washington State

The Liberty Wildland-Urban Interface Fuels Reduction Project is located near the historic town site of Liberty along the east slopes of the Cascade Mountains, approximately 15 miles northeast of Cle Elum, Washington. It includes National Forest System land surrounding the historic town site and other smaller communities such as Liberty Mountain Home and other private property.

There is a long history of fire occurrence within the project area, partly because of the heavy use of nearby U.S. Highway 97, which serves as the direct route between Interstate 90 to the south and U.S. Highway 2 to the north. Because of Highway 97, much of the area is easily accessed and the number of human-caused fires has increased over the years. High fire occurrence can also be attributed to the increase in development, recreation, and hunting within the area. In addition, the project area is characterized as a mixed severity fire regime, condition classes 2 and 3.

The purpose of the project is to protect the community from a large-scale wildfire by reducing hazardous fuels within the wildland/urban interface. This will be accomplished by removing large and small trees, pruning, hand piling, and underburning along designated roads and ridgetops and around private property. The project area is approximately 2000 acres in size. It is expected that the project will reduce the severe fire hazard currently existing around the Liberty communities, provide some protection for nearby late-successional reserves, and will increase fire suppression effectiveness while providing for better firefighter safety.

Partners in this project have included the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, Kittitas County Fire District #7, the Kittitas Department of Emergency Management, the Kittitas County Sheriff's Office, the communities of Liberty, Liberty Mountain Home, and Lauderdale, and two small business owners. The media have also been interested in the collaborative wildfire protection planning occurring with the involvement of these partners. At least two major Seattle television stations interviewed individuals this summer with respect to this planning.

The project is currently in the planning stages. A decision is expected in March 2005, with implementation the following June. The project will be planned and implemented with the authorities in Title I of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.

This project, in combination with the Community Wildfire Protection Plans that are under way, has been a catalyst for nearby communities, the state and federal agencies, and local government to develop working relationships with one another. This has led to better results, greater efficiency, and increased support from the public for treatment activities. Since work began on the project, the District has received numerous phone calls from concerned citizens asking how they can get involved in creating a Community Wildfire Protection Plan for their community to facilitate a collaborative partnership with the Forest Service in treating hazardous fuels around their communities.