

National Fire Plan Hazardous Fuels Reduction Idaho 2003



Pomerelle Ski Area Fuels Reduction Project

The Minidoka Ranger District of the Sawtooth National Forest has partnered up with the Pomerelle Ski Area to reduce fuels on 219 acres within the Ski Area Boundary using National Fire Plan Funding. The permittee and agency representatives share concerns specific to the high potential of fire due to a combination of a variety of factors. Those factors are; an unnatural level of accumulated dead fuel, the wildland urban interface location, and an area of very high recreation value and use. Should a wildfire start inside the ski area boundary, it will be much easier to control the fire and keep it from threatening and spreading to other developments such as recreation residences, campgrounds and rangelands within the perimeter of the ski area when this project is complete.

The goal of the project is to reduce the fuel to chips that lay flat on the ground – not more than 4” deep. Currently, the fuel bed is 2 feet deep and elevated where air and wind can have a very substantial influence, should a fire start or enter this area. Fire burning in a 4” layer of chips will burn considerably slower and greatly improve the ease of building fire line through the area. A side benefit resulting from the chipping of the accumulated dead fuels is opening up the stands of trees between the ski runs for “tree skiing” in the winter. The wood that has commercial value will be sold. Material left over will be made available to the public for firewood.

Approximately 60% of the funding for this project is from the National Fire Plan. Work started on this project on July 7 and is expected to be completed by October 30 of 2003.

Project partners recently took a tour of the project area to observe some of the work underway. They had an opportunity to view some of the equipment used.



See the article below from *The Times News* out of Twin Falls, Idaho, for more information.

Contact information: Ed Waldapfel, Public Affairs Officer, Sawtooth National Forest

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

Clearing out fire fuel ... Forest Service project aims to prevent catastrophic blazes in key areas

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By Julie Pence
Times-News writer

ALBION -- Next winter at Pomerelle Mountain Ski Resort, skiers will have a lot more paths through the trees than they have had before -- thanks to the U.S. Forest Service.



JULIE PENCE/The Times-News
In the foreground, U.S. Forest Service firefighter Glenn Lackey studies 'snag' trees soon to be eliminated from about 200 acres at the Pomerelle ski area in Howell Canyon near Albion. The project will reduce the fire fuel load in the area.

But it isn't just the owner of Pomerelle who is going to benefit from the \$133,000 worth of forest cleanup for which the Forest Service has contracted.

Homeowners, ranchers with grazing privileges, recreationists, hunters -- anyone who uses the Sawtooth National Forest in Howell Canyon in and near Pomerelle will benefit from the cleaning of the forest floor that is taking place, officials say. The Pomerelle ski area property is owned by the Forest Service. Resort owner Woody Anderson is five years into a 30-year lease.

Called a "hazardous fuel reduction project" by foresters, the idea is to reduce large pieces of flammable wood and rotting debris into tiny chips, leaving behind healthy trees and bushes.

"This way, there won't be large pieces left that burn long and hot," District Ranger Scott Nannenga said. "The smaller pieces burn with less intensity."

The Forest Service contracted with an eastern Oregon company that is using a loader with a disc attachment that chews up branches, dead trees and stumps. At the same time the wood is smoothed across the forest floor, exuding the stimulating scent of fresh wood chips. It will eventually decompose and enrich the soil.

It is the first project of its kind to be undertaken in the southern end of the Sawtooth National Forest. About 60 percent of the money for it came from National Fire Plan funding. Passed by Congress as a result of the out-of-control 2000 fire season, it is a national, long-term strategy for the restoration of fire-prone ecosystems, forest personnel said.

Foresters chose the area not only because it has not seen a fire in at least 100 years, but also because there could be significant economic damage to forest users should a fire start in the designated 200 acres at Pomerelle, said Brad Sawyer, district fuels manager. When there hasn't been a fire for that period of time, the likelihood is everything would be leveled because of the large volume of combustible fuel in the forest.

Sawyer explained that cleaning up the ski area also means making adjacent areas safer because there will be less of a chance for fire to spread.

The next area the Forest Service will likely target on the southern range will be Rock Creek Canyon, Nannenga said.

"Rock Creek Canyon sees extremely high use -- especially in the summer," Nannenga said.

The criteria the Forest Service uses to pinpoint an area for cleanup include an unnatural level of accumulated dead fuel located in an urban interface area that also has a high recreation value and use, Sawyer said.

Times-News writer Julie Pence can be reached at 735-3241 or by e-mail at jpence@magicvalley.com.