

National Fire Plan

Blowdown Clean-Up Long-term Effort

Minnesota

Multi-year project



The powerful storm that ripped through northern Minnesota on July 4, 1999, flattened millions of trees on 477,000 acres of the Superior National Forest. It was one of the largest “blowdown” events ever recorded in North America, and presented the single greatest challenge to forest health the Superior National Forest had ever faced.

Immediately after the storm, search and rescue crews spent many days scouring every area of the forest for stranded people while hundreds of relief workers cleared debris. State and federal agencies worked together with county and local organizations to reduce the threat of wildfire, and protect property in the adjacent communities hit hardest by the storm.

But these initial recovery efforts were only the beginning.



Blowdown piled up on structures in and around the national forest.



Broken treetops quickly become hazardous fuels.

Parts of the forest were filled with high concentrations of hazardous fuels, posing a threat of catastrophic wildfire.

After initially clearing roads, portages, and campsites, the Forest Service and partners began the process to remove dangerous fuels near private property.

The Forest Service launched an intense analysis to assess the situation and determine a course of action. The study concluded that preventative fuels treatment projects in the wildland-urban



Lighting a prescribed burn.

interface should be implemented to reduce the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire fed by blowdown material.

Logging, stewardship contracts, prescribed fire, and mechanical methods have cleared debris from about 30,000 acres outside the Wilderness. The National Fire Plan is funding hazardous fuels treatments (prescribed fire) inside the BWCAW: about 2,400 acres had been treated thus far. These funds will allow hazardous fuels reduction treatments to continue with a focus on the wildland-urban interface. Fire managers predict it will take another five to seven years to complete the planned fuels reduction.