

National Fire Plan

Reducing Southern Hazardous Fuels

Mississippi 2002



214,000 Acres Treated

Removing hazardous fuels from the forest floor provides a safe domain for private land owners, protection of sensitive, threatened and endangered species and reduces the amount of funds needed to suppress wildfires. Continued forest maintenance and management of fire dependent ecosystems is vital in the Southern Region for T&E species such as the Red Cockaded Woodpecker, Gopher Frog, and Gopher Tortoise.

The National Forest in Mississippi hasn't always been in a position to meet the needs of private landowners and dependent ecosystems. Prior to 1999, the Forest removed hazardous fuels on less than 110,000 acres annually out of the total 1.2 million acres of dense forested land. The Forest was barely keeping up with the fuels reduction needs in prescribed fire.

As a result of an increase in funding from \$1.3 M to \$3.2M through the National Fire Plan, the Forest is on its way to removing the threat of wildfires. In 2001, the Forest treated 214,000 acres of National Forest lands. More than half this treatment occurred in urban communities and along the coastal areas of the State where some of the most complex burning conditions exist in the nation. "We've made significant progress in urban communities," said Fire Management Officer Mike Melton. "Without the support of funding to hire 41 new full time employees and treat these acres, our communities and ecosystems would still be facing severe threats from wildfires."

They won't stop there. In 2003 the Forest hopes to treat 220,000 acres. Over 80% of the Forest fuels program is concentrated in the Urban Interface areas. An aggressive program of this magnitude allows the Forest to treat its acres about every five years, eventually eliminating the possibility of a catastrophic fire occurring, except in the most extreme of conditions.