



Mueller State Park

Fire Mitigation Project

Project Description

There are three project areas that will be active in fall/spring of 2005/2006 at Mueller State Park:

- 5 acres around the Visitor Center,
- 7 acres around the Maintenance Shop,
- 4 acres around the new Cabins.

The work has been designed primarily to create defensible space around these structures. Additional acres were included to reduce fire intensity and increase resistance to insects and disease.



Proposed Treatment

- Visitors Center and Cabin: Work will be done with hand-felling of trees to reduce impacts and minimize large equipment noise. Work will occur on weekdays.
- Maintenance Center: This project will involve mastication (heavy chipping equipment) and deeper slash piles.
- Usable wood will be turned into firewood product.
- Slash (woody debris) will be chipped and will not exceed a 6" depth to ensure understory recovery.
- More trees will be thinned around the structures, and thinning will phase out further from the structures.
- Ladder fuels will be removed. Well-formed ponderosa pines will be retained; groups of aspen and spruce will be retained wherever possible.
- Stumps will be cut to within 2" of the ground.

Rationale for Recommended Management Treatments

The fuel mitigation is intended to protect the Park structures and reduce fire intensity to improve evacuation times in the event of a major fire. The Visitor's Center, Cabins and the Maintenance Area represent the largest capitol investments in the Park. These areas were also given the highest priority for mitigation in the Park's Fuels Management Plan. The areas near the Visitor's Center and Cabins will be highly visible to park users, and will be used as demonstration areas for future projects.

The effectiveness of these projects can be increased when neighbors participate in fuel mitigation on their property. For information and assistance on fuel mitigation on your property, contact the Colorado State Forest Service, Woodland Park District at 719-687-2951.



Long-term Benefits

In addition to protection of structures and mitigation of the wildfire hazard, the project may also improve resistance to insects and disease in these forests.

Forest Fuel Mitigation

What is Fuel Mitigation?

Fuel Mitigation is forest management directed at reducing the risk of large wildfires. This can be done in a number of ways and varies by forest type. The main goal is to slow the spread of fire to protect people and structures. In some cases, fuel mitigation can improve the resistance of trees to disease and pests, protect watersheds or restore historic ecological conditions

Why is it a big deal now?

Forest fuel mitigation is now in the news for numerous reasons.

Wildland-Urban Interface – Human development is increasing in forested areas where fire is a natural occurrence, therefore more homes and communities are at risk of large fires.

Drought and Stress – Colorado is experiencing a prolonged drought that has resulted in drier and more flammable fuels. Insect epidemics and forest parasites such as mistletoe, which are native to Colorado, may be increasing in numbers and severity due to drought.

Fire Suppression – Particularly at lower elevations, fires have been suppressed for many years and smaller trees and denser forests are providing more fuels.

Maturing Forests – Across Colorado, many forests were burned and logged in the late-1800s. Many of these forests are now reaching a mature state that produces more fuels for fire.

As the fires of 2000-2002 brought to people's attention, all of these factors can combine to result in dramatic consequences for homes and communities.

How is mitigation being performed on State Parks?

Projects on State Parks lands are designed to slow the spread and reduce the risk of wildfires, to minimize the impacts to wildlife and natural vegetation, to mimic natural processes to the largest extent possible, and to maintain the aesthetics that visitors expect in State Parks. The types of projects on State Parks lands include:

Defensible Space – clearing & thinning trees and brush back about 200 feet from structures. CSFS Firewise information can provide details for your home (www.ext.colostate.edu/pubs/natres/06302.html).

Prescribed Burning – reintroducing burning helps to mimic the natural disturbance processes in order to keep down fuel loads and, in some cases, improve understory species.

Thinning in Ponderosa and Oak – at lower elevations, where vegetation has become dense from fire suppression, we can thin to levels that are less likely to carry large fires, and in some cases this process may restore the forests to conditions that resemble those of hundreds of years ago.

Lodgepole Patch Cuts – different forest types require different methods. Lodgepole requires larger cuts because of its unique ecology, so we typically cut patches of 2-10 acres.

Aspen Selection – particularly in mixed conifer forests, selective thinning can be used to promote more aspen regrowth, which provides good habitat for elk and deer.

Funding

These projects are possible because of Great Outdoor Colorado (GOCO) funding for inventory and planning and USFS Fire Plan funding for project implementation. State Parks does the planning and the Colorado State Forest Service oversees the actual mitigation projects. Most of our parks are part of Front Range Fuel Treatment Partnerships, where State Parks are one part of the landscape being treated.



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