

NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

Lime Creek Prescribed Fire Project

Idaho

2003



Funded by the National Fire plan, fire managers on the Mountain Home Ranger District of the Boise National Forest and the Fairfield Ranger District of the Sawtooth National Forest burned nearly 2,700 acres last October to enhance aspen growth.

“We have lost about 60 percent of the aspen acres in this area, as Douglas-fir, sagebrush and other species have encroached,” said Mountain Home Ranger District fuels planner Bill Powlshen. “Many of the aspen stands in this area are not regenerating, and once aspen disappears, it can take centuries to be restored.”

The weather, a key factor, was in place in late October when most of the burning occurred. Low humidity, warm temperatures and generally dry conditions created the right mix to rejuvenate the aspen stands. “Unlike some of the low-intensity underburning that we may do in other situations, a relatively hot fire was needed for this project to reduce the encroaching Douglas-fir trees,” said Myron Hotinger, Boise NF South Zone Fuels Management Officer. “We do not start these types of fires until we are within the right window of wind, relative humidity, temperature and fuel moisture conditions,” added Buz Vanskike, Sawtooth NF burning boss for the project.

Fall burning also killed many older, decadent aspen trees, thus stimulating aspen regeneration during root suckering. Killing the older aspen also eliminated or greatly reduced the chance of disease, such as the false timber fungus, thereby improving aspen vigor.



Using prescribed fire to restore aspen forests

Aspen is a critical component of many Idaho ecosystems, as it provides nesting for the 13 species of cavity nesting birds on the Boise and Sawtooth NFs; forage for elk and deer; aspen buds for grouse; diversity of species; beautiful fall scenery; and fire-resistant vegetation during part of its life cycle.

The burn was part of the Lime Creek project, a series of prescribed fires to be carried out on 9,000 acres over four to six years within an overall 40,000-acre area. More than 1,750 acres were burned in 2002 during the initial phase of the project.

Because the project treats aspen stands over a large landscape and will help improve big-game summer range, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation has contributed \$10,000 towards the next phase of Lime Creek burning, scheduled for fall, 2004. This partnership funding will help support aerial ignition operations.

In addition, aspen stands and other vegetation will be monitoring through site visits and photo points after the fire, to gauge the effectiveness of the burning on vegetative response. This monitoring will help the Forests as they regenerate aspen in other areas in future years.