



Zion National Park News Release

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For Immediate Release
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Zion National Park Begins an Environmental Assessment

Zion National Park is preparing an Environmental Assessment (EA) to assess the impacts of the aerial application of herbicide on the area burned in the Dakota Hill Fire Complex. The fire complex included two lightning-caused fires that started on July 15, 2007 and burned 5,890 acres within the park. The west fire burned about 2,000 acres on the southern end of Horse Pasture Plateau and the east fire burned over 3,700 acres north of Orderville Canyon. The EA will also analyze additional herbicide treatments to about 10,000 acres burned in June 2006 Kolob Fire. Because of the remote and rough terrain in the burn area, helicopter application of the herbicide is proposed.

The proposed aerial application of herbicide is intended to interrupt the grass-fire cycle that is perpetuated by cheatgrass, a non-native, highly flammable grass. Cheatgrass increases in abundance and density after fire. As cheatgrass continues to invade and increase after each fire, the time between fires becomes shorter. Since the native shrubs and trees are slower to re-establish after fire and need many years between fire events to complete their lifecycles, the increased fire frequency fueled by cheatgrass eventually eliminates the native shrubs and trees from the landscape.

A treatment is needed to interrupt the grass-fire cycle that has already been established, but has not yet eliminated the native seed from the soil. The National Park Service (NPS) proposes to treat the burned area with the herbicides Plateau and Roundup. Plateau targets cheatgrass seed before germination: reducing the growth of cheatgrass which reduces the fine fuels that carry wildland fires. Plateau has shown a very low toxicity to humans, fish and wildlife, and does not remain in the soil. Roundup is a non-selective post-emergence herbicide which works by foliar uptake and completely biodegrades within 21 days. It is practically non-toxic to humans and wildlife and moderately toxic in the first 96 hours to aquatic life forms. In order to mitigate any impacts to aquatic life, a ¼ to ½ mile no-spray buffer along all streams will be part of the proposed action.

The NPS welcomes your comments, suggestions, and other input concerning this project to help us identify issues of concern and to ensure that the EA thoroughly addresses potential impacts from the proposal. Please submit written comments by August 23, 2007 to: Dakota Hill Fire Rehabilitation, Zion National Park, Springdale, UT 84767.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so. For more information contact Kelly Fuhrmann, Fire Ecologist, at (435) 772-0193.

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