



Zion National Park Fire Management



Volunteer Group Participates in Hazard Fuel Cleanup

While they could have been soaking up sun on the beaches of Cancun, this VIP (Volunteers in Parks) group of students from the University of Virginia chose instead to spend their spring break doing a service project in Zion National Park. The 13-person VIP group helped the park's fire management staff reduce some of the hazardous fuels near the Grotto Picnic area in Zion Canyon. They picked up and piled downed and dead debris that accumulated over the years and has led to an increased risk from wildland fire. The group worked with fire management for two days and also assisted other divisions in the park with service projects.

The Grotto Picnic area is one of the park's shuttle system stops as well as a trailhead for some of the canyon's popular hikes. It is also the site of the park's original visitor center, which is now on the National Register of Historic Places. Once cleared of downed debris, the area can be used as a safety zone for both firefighters and the public in the event of a wildland fire. The park's fire management crews, along with local contract crews, have been working over the past few years to reduce hazardous fuels in the Zion Canyon area in accordance with the park's

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The main goal of this fuel reduction project was to make it easier for the park's maintenance division, with guidance from the fire and resource management staffs, to conduct their third consecutive year of mowing excessive exotic vegetation in the canyon to also reduce the risks from wildland fires. Much of the debris picked up by the VIPs was hidden in the high grass, thus making it difficult for the mowers to see it. The group placed the removed debris into piles that was burned a few days later when it snowed in Zion Canyon.

This VIP fuel cleanup in Zion National Park is a great example of college students willing to forgo the normal spring break activities and instead provide a valuable service for the park, which in turn will help protect park visitors and resources. Due to this group's (and other VIPs) efforts the park is better able to continue the tradition of perpetuating the natural and cultural resources for which they were established.

