



Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

Nature Trail Prescribed Fire: Successful Implementation through Adapting and Timing

The Nature Trail Prescribed Fire, completed in the late fall of 2011, was a particularly satisfying project for fire management employees in the parks.

Located in Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon National Park, this project provided critical fuels reduction between two separate developed areas, National Park Service employee housing and the National Park Service stables.

Fire has long been a natural process in the Sierra Nevada, and a was historically frequent event in the Cedar Grove area. Fire suppression policies over the last century have resulted in abnormally high levels of forest fuels. Prescribed fire consumes these fuels under favorable conditions. This reduces the risk of an unwanted fire during hotter, drier conditions.

Completing this project in the late fall was ideal for fire managers because visitation is low in Cedar Grove and most visitor services are suspended for the season. This timing significantly reduced the number of visitors and employees that were affected by the localized smoke impacts.

“This area has seen a significant amount of prescribed fire and wildfire in the last several years, so it was gratifying for me to get this key project completed with minimal impacts to visitors and employees,” said Ben Jacobs, the parks’ Fuels Specialist and the Nature Trail Burn Boss.

Park staff also demonstrated a great deal resiliency to get this project done. Fire personnel were focused on higher elevation burns in the mixed conifer forests near Grant Grove and Giant Forest. However an early fall storm made many of these areas too wet for prescribed fire projects.



Top photo: Ben Jacobs on the Nature Trail Prescribed Fire Bottom Photo: Fire occurred as frequently as every 3-5 years in the Cedar Grove Valley Floor.

NPS photos

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Jacobs shifted the priority to Cedar Grove. At a lower elevation, fuel conditions were optimal for the project. He wrote the burn plan (originally slated for the following year) and worked with park personnel to review and approve the plan quickly. Firefighters worked hard to prepare the unit in advance once the priority shifted.

“For me, it demonstrated how effective we can be when we work together. The firefighters, resource management and maintenance employees, and on to the Superintendent really stepped up to ensure that this project could be completed safely,” Jacobs said. “A critical project that protects human communities in Cedar Grove while providing the ecological benefits of fire to the fire-adapted forest was completed through this teamwork.”

Contact: Deb Schweizer, Fire Education Specialist
Phone: (559) 565-3703



Key fuels reduction in Cedar Grove, a popular summer destination in the parks.

NPS photo