



Zion National Park Fire Management

Blue Creek Prescribed Fire

Zion National Park Fire Management personnel recently completed the 500-acre Blue Creek Burn as part of their ongoing prescribed fire (RX) program. This burn, located near Lava Point Campground in the northern portion of the park, is one of many that are planned in the coming years under the guidance of Zion's Fire Management Plan.

The lack of fire in this area of Zion (due mainly to past suppression efforts) has contributed to high fuel loadings and a change in forest structure. Prescribed fire is a treatment to reverse these changes brought on by fire exclusion. The goals and objectives of the Blue Creek RX were to reduce fuel loadings, increase success of remaining Ponderosa pine forests to withstand natural fires, reduce extent of brush lands, rejuvenate aspen stands, thin dense mixed conifer stands and protect historic structures.

The Blue Creek RX was a cooperative effort between state, local and federal agencies. Zion Fire Management personnel utilized the assistance of over 80 individuals and associated equipment including a 20 person type II hand crew, two Fire Use Training Academy Modules, Boise BLM smokejumpers, fire personnel from other national parks, four wildland firefighting engines, two water tenders and a helicopter operations module. A fire camp was established inside the park to accommodate the firefighters and a catering service provided meals. Zion Park personnel supplied other logistical and support needs.

Much of the pre-burn preparation on the unit was completed in previous seasons. This included mechanical thinning of excess vegetation in areas around the campground and the subsequent winter burning of this debris in piles. Monitoring plots were established in the burn unit and will be evaluated in the future to measure the fire's effects and determine if pre-burn goals and objectives were met.

Once all the conditions were within pre-determined prescription levels, ignition of the unit began. Initial burnout and blacklining around the northern section of the unit boundary was done by hand ignition using drip torches. The interior of the unit was burned by aerial ignition from a helicopter utilizing a Plastic Sphere Dispenser (PSD) machine. Holding crews and engines were stationed at critical points along the burn units' boundaries to ensure the fire stayed within the planned unit. Fire Monitors were also stationed at various points near the burn to measure the fire's effects and to provide updated weather conditions.

This burn closed the gap remaining in a string of projects, tying the 1999 Pocket Mesa RX west of the unit with the 1997 Goose Creek RX on the east. The combination of these projects will increase the safety to firefighters attempting to hold fire lines during fire events, as well as improving the possibility of allowing future natural fires to be managed as restoration fires.

The 1995 Federal Wildland Fire Policy mandates federal land management agencies within fire dependent communities to reintroduce and maintain fire as part of ecosystem management. Prescribed fire projects are to be conducted in a manner consistent with land and resource management plans, public health considerations, and approved prescribed fire plans. The policy of using fire as a tool will help decrease risks to life, property and resources and will help perpetuate the values for which Zion National Park was established.

