

**Fiscal Year:** 2014

**State:** Colorado

**Agency:** National Park Service

**Theme:** Maintain and Restore Resilient Landscapes

## **Park Completes Resource Management Fuel Reduction Project Mesa Verde National Park, Utah Cohesive Strategy – Maintain and Restore Resilient Landscapes**

On April 8, 2014 Mesa Verde National Park's Fire Management staff completed a successful resource management driven fuel reduction project in the park. The Bobcat Prescribed Burn (Rx) project is located on the south end of Wetherill Mesa, in the southwest corner of the park. The primary objective of this small, nine acre Rx was to protect a grove of large ponderosa pine trees from future loss to wildfire by reducing an unnatural buildup of vegetation that has occurred over the past 110 years. This excess vegetation was mainly due to fire exclusion and suppression. In a natural fire cycle, ponderosa pine forests normally burn every 5-20 years thus reducing the fuel load. The protection of this grove of ponderosa pine trees may also offer benefits to the threatened Mexican Spotted Owl which calls some of the canyons in Mesa Verde home. These large trees provide hunting sites for the birds and also may provide protection from predators.



Fuel reduction around cultural site

Even though this was a small Rx from an acreage aspect and was completed in one day, it did have some complexity issues including working in steep canyon terrain and having as one of the objectives of the burn as zero mortality of the ponderosa pine. The canyon also has significant Native American cultural resource sites, including dwellings and a granary set in the canyon walls. The protection of these sites was a major priority.

The Rx did require a difficult ignition pattern utilizing hand held drip torches in order for the burn to be successful. Ponderosa pines are expected to have a 95 percent survival rate within the burn unit while pinyon and juniper trees are not expected to survive. This, in turn, will help the ponderosa pine to flourish and reduce the risks from a wildfire. The oak that was burned in the canyon is expected to re-sprout in the future.

The Bobcat Rx will provide numerous benefits to Mesa Verde National Park including a lowered risk from wildland fire and a benefit to the plants and animals of the fire-adapted ponderosa pine ecosystem, especially the Mexican Spotted Owl. The policy of using fire as a management tool will help decrease risks to life, property and resources and will perpetuate the values for which the park was established.

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