

Tam Fire

May 9, 2004

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Golden Gate
National Recreation Area



Summary

On Sunday afternoon, May 9th, 2004, emergency crews responded to a wildland fire near the Tamalpais Valley community. The fire was burning on Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA) property, in close proximity to many homes. Federal, state and local agencies cooperated to contain the fire by early Monday morning. No structures were damaged and no injuries were reported. Investigation into the cause is currently underway. GGNRA's Fire Management Office is now working to stabilize and rehabilitate the site.

Background

GGNRA and Marin County fire officials have long recognized the potential fire hazard in the wildland urban interface of Tamalpais Valley. A 70 acre stand of highly flammable eucalyptus trees intermix with hundreds of homes. Narrow local roads make emergency access and egress difficult.

To address these hazards, the National Park Service, Southern Marin Fire District and Marin County Fire Department have been working closely to improve emergency access and reduce the chance of a catastrophic wildfire. In 2003 the first phase of this effort began with a series of fuel reduction projects in and around the 70 acre eucalyptus stand.

Crews cleared vegetation along the fire road that bisects the stand in order to provide safe emergency access. This road

proved a critical asset in the suppression of Sunday's fire. Crews then thinned vegetation along Shoreline Highway and removed eucalyptus where it had spread across the road.

Eucalyptus was then removed at the Miwok trailhead to provide safe emergency access and serve as a fuel break in the event of a larger fire. With the non-native trees removed, the park was able to revegetate with native plants.

During the fire this opened area was utilized as a landing zone for emergency helicopters and for fire fighter access.

Future project plans included continued thinning of the eucalyptus stand's perimeter along Shoreline Highway and the Muir Meadows neighborhood.

For tips on how to protect your home from a wildland fire, check our website at www.nps.gov/goga/fire/ and the Fire Safe Marin website at www.firesafemarin.org.

Three Phases of Response

Suppression

The first phase of fire operations is suppression. Crews dug firelines around the perimeter of the fire and supported the line with water and fire suppression foam. A helicopter dropped water on hotter areas from above. Once the main fire died down, crews snuffed out smoldering vegetation with hand tools and water.

Stabilization

The next phase is to stabilize the area. Fortunately, the fire occurred early in the season. Weather and fuel conditions kept the fire from climbing into the tree canopy where it would have been far more difficult to contain.

The hot ground fire that did occur charred the bases of many trees. This charring killed the cambium layer and weakened the integrity of the tree in most cases. These trees are prone to falling over in the windy conditions common to this region. To mitigate this danger, the park is removing hazard trees. Cut vegetation is chipped to facilitate the next phase of fire operations.



Rehabilitation

Park ecologists are working with the Fire Management Office to develop a plan for rehabilitating the site. To minimize erosion, chips are spread across the burned area to reduce soil runoff. Larger eucalyptus logs will be placed across steep slopes to aid in erosion control. All materials such as flagging and hoses will be removed from the site before crews leave. Once heat is no longer detected, the firelines will be fully rehabilitated to restore the natural landscape. Native revegetation will commence as seedlings become available from park native plant nurseries.

Contact Information

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