



A NEW APPROACH TO HAZARD FUEL REDUCTION AT WHISKEYTOWN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA

The National Park Service at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area continues to test new ways to reduce the hazardous build-up of forest fuels. In November of 2002 Whiskeytown contracted with North Tree, a local private contractor, for the use of a brush masticator. The brush masticator treated a fifteen-acre test site of mixed oak and heavy brush. The masticator is a small scale, rubber-tracked vehicle with a ground pressure rating of less than four pounds per square inch. The machine is able to thin and shred low growing brush, leaving overstory vegetation and select trees undisturbed. This treatment establishes a break in ladder fuels that will effectively reduce the threat of uncontrollable crown fires under all but the most extreme conditions.



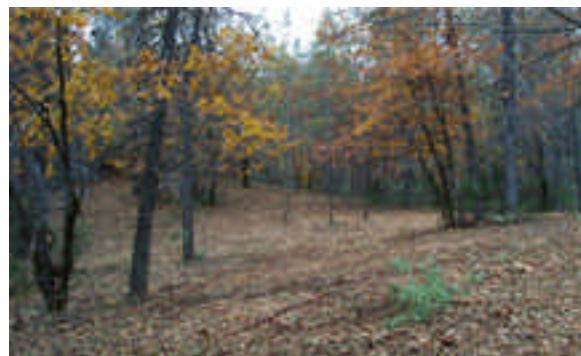
Forest fuel 's build-up at Whiskeytown



Rubber-tracked brush masticator



After treatment with the brush masticator



The masticator thins brush, leaving the overstay intact

Advantages of the brush masticator treatment over traditional hand thinning:

- It cost less than ¼ the cost per acre of comparable hand thinning treatments.
- The elimination of undesired canopy scorch from burn piles to residual trees
- Retention of a mulch layer that protects soil surface retains nutrients on site and minimizes the threat of exotic plant invasions.

Advantages of this treatment over prescribed fire:

- Expanded window of opportunity,
- Elimination of risk of fire escape
- Elimination of fire related mortality that frequently occurs at undesirable levels in prescription fires
- Ability to fine tune treatments to meet desired results.

Whiskeytown is in the process of writing its updated Fire Management Plan, which includes an Environmental Impact Statement. This document will guide Whiskeytown's Fire Program for the next ten years and allow the park to look for new and cost effective ways, like brush masticators, to reduce fuels and work towards healthy forests, watersheds and sustainable ecosystems.