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Teton Interagency Fire Management Vegetation Mapping Crew Completes Third Season



Grand Teton National Park's Vegetation Mapping crew recently finished its third data collection season, continuing work on an integrated project with the park's Division of Science & Resource Management and Fire Management Office. The two divisions jointly fund the work.

Under the direction of the National Vegetation Classification program, the project was initiated in the fall of 2001. It was developed to update and improve a fifteen year- old map showing vegetation types and locations throughout the park. Though the map detailed the overstory, or tree components on the landscape, it did not describe the understory vegetation, such as grasses and shrubs. Understory vegetation plays a key role in both fire behavior and intensity. Resource specialists devised a strategy and implemented the vegetation mapping protocol to create a more accurate and detailed map that can then be converted to fuel models.

During the 2002 and 2003 summer seasons, crews collected data through intense field work. They measured critical information such as tree heights, tree diameters, crown ratios, crown base height, and quantities of dead and downed material. The data was then analyzed during the 2003 and 2004 winter seasons and used to produce a map and vegetation type key. This past field season focused on groundtruthing the key and the map.

The Biological Technicians staffing the field crew bring to the project a variety of backgrounds, including experience in botany, fire effects, and forestry. The 7- 9 person crew is led by the park's Botanist.

Next year's summer season will utilize a smaller crew to collect final data. When finished, the program will have produced a classification of vegetation types, a written description of each vegetation type, a map of the vegetation and fuel models for Grand Teton National Park to predict fire behavior. The project is expected to be completed by December 2005.

