



Tharps – “A Model Prescribed Fire”

On July 2, 2004, fire crews at Sequoia National Park completed the 257-acre Tharps Prescribed Fire after five days of ignition. The burn “behaved like a model prescription fire, with the smoke barely noticed by Three Rivers residents,” said the Kaweah Commonwealth, a local newspaper.

Fire managers were also pleased with the results of the prescribed fire. Located in the center of Giant Forest, the unit was a combination of ten smaller burn units ignited between 1987 and 1997. The consumption of ground fuels and small trees will reduce the risk of larger fires in the future and will stimulate new growth, especially of giant sequoias.

Research shows that giant sequoia groves survived regular fires throughout history, every 5-20 years on average. The Tharps burn was an important link in maintaining the natural fire cycle in Giant Forest.

Many park visitors had the opportunity to observe the Tharps Prescribed Fire while hiking near Crescent Meadow. “Whenever possible, the parks keep trails open during projects so that visitors can experience the way a fire burns in a sequoia grove,” said Jody Lyle, Fire Education Specialist. “I really enjoy communicating with people about our fire program when they see it in action right before their eyes.”



Forty-four National Park Service firefighters were assigned to the project, including staff from Saguaro National Park and Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. Personnel on scene used hand-held drip torches to ignite the prescribed fire while managers worked closely with the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District to manage smoke production and reduce local impacts.

The parks invest considerable time and money in monitoring smoke from fires. Particulate data is collected with air quality monitoring equipment at Ash Mountain, just above Three Rivers. The parks also station staff members near projects to record visual observations. All this information helps fire managers make reasonable decisions about igniting each day.

For more information, call (559) 565-3703 or go to www.nps.gov/seki/fire/portal/portal.htm.