
Fuels Treatment Protects Wildland Community in Northern Idaho

In late August 2005 the crops were in and the grass seed farmers were burning in accordance with the usual processes—obtaining burn permits from the State of Idaho and approval from the Coeur d’Alene Tribal Lands Department for smoke management. Fire lines were plowed around the fields in preparation for burning. The plow and water truck were on site, along with fire hose and farm staff. A breeze out of the south was favorable to burn the grass seed fields using a backing fire, but shortly after ignition, the fire jumped the east fire break into a stubble field and made an uphill run, toward a timber stand.

In the spring of 2005 the lower third of the slope to the north of the burned unit, and near a dozen or so structures, had undergone hazard fuels reduction. The remaining stand of mixed fir and ponderosa pine had a dense understory of shrubs, and was bordered by a dense stand of mixed species regeneration and brush. The area the fire entered was a unit scheduled for hazard fuel reduction which had not yet been treated.

On the day of the fire the fuel moistures were exceedingly low. The escaped fire was five acres when Tribal Fire arrived, but under the influence of the south wind and the slope, the fire was spreading rapidly into the timber stand and moving towards the nearby structures. Several spots pushed the fire to the north toward the structures and the area where the fuels reduction projects had been completed. The fire was surrounded by dozer line in after four hours and had grown to nearly 50 acres.



Field Burn Escapes into Timber Stand

The treated area did not burn as readily or as hot as the untreated area, and did not allow the fire to carry over into the structures. The local residents were very thankful the treatments had been completed, and other residents in the area realized the value of hazardous fuels reduction and have since requested treatments on their properties. If the fuels treatments had not been done, the fire might well have consumed 400 acres and several structures before being brought under control.

Contact: Eric Geisler, Fuels Forester, Coeur d’Alene Tribe, 208-686-5030