

Megram Fire - Issues and Opportunities

The treatment of the Megram Fire, or decision not to treat, represents an opportunity to clarify the terms by which late-successional reserves (LSRs) can be treated following events like windstorms (blowdown), wildfire, insect and disease outbreaks. The constraints imposed by LSR designation can lead to higher risk and ultimately greater loss of LSR area and functions to natural and human caused events. In the case of the Megram Fire, the desire to retain LSR conditions following the fire may restrict restoration actions like fuels treatment which might mitigate future wildfire risk, extent, or intensity or LWD removal to protect streamcourses from log jams and stream bank erosion, negative impacts on the anadromous fishery habitat in the lower half of Horse Linto Creek.

The Trinity County Natural Resource Advisory Council (NRAC) might be a good group to develop guidelines for acceptable salvage logging practices, equipment, treatment of slash and non-harvest generated fuels, desired outcomes of a salvage harvest and fuels treatment project.

The support of NRAC and other county and community-based groups could be valuable to the Forest Service in planning and implementing actions to minimize negative impacts of the Megram Fire in the near term (soil erosion, salvage logging or mechanical equipment operation) and in the future (reduce fuel hazard, excessive woody debris into streamcourses).

The Megram Fire is an opportunity to test models of LWD recruitment to streams; of changes in fuels and fire risk as fire killed timber falls and decomposes, as grass and brush revegetated the burned area.

Next steps - Facilitate Forest Service process in making post-fire restoration decisions and plans. Assist local communities and communities of interest in participating in the Forest Service planning and decision-making process.

The Megram Fire: Effects of Fuels Treatment on Wildfire Impacts

The Megram Fire: Field Trip

May 25, 2000 Synthesis of field trip - Gary Nakamura

This is a synthesis of what I got from the field trip and not a minutes or a consensus understanding of the points made on the field trip.

In attendance: Trinity County Natural Resources Advisory Council and Fire Safe Council (Pat Frost, Ken Baldwin, a few others), Trinity County Office of Ed (Jim French), Bureau of Indian Affairs (Bill Saffell), CDF, Assyman. Dickerson Dickerson's staff (Jason, Steve Fitch), Shasta College (Dan Scollon), Humboldt State Univ (Yvonne Everett), Watershed Research and Training Center (Cecilia Danks, Roger Jagel, one other), Trinity County Board of Supervisors (Chris Erikson, Arnold Whitridge), Forest Service (Marcia Andre, John Larson, Rob McClelland, Clarence Hostler, Joe Rogaski, a few others), Shasta-Tehama Bioregional Council (Jim Miller), PSW Research Station (Bill Oliver, Carl Skinner), NorCal SAF (Bill Keye), UC Coop. Ext. (Gary Nakamura).

Lone Pine Ridge stops - view the effects of various levels of fuels treatment prior to the Megram Fire. Phase II treatments were LWD removal (salvage logging blowdown trees), pile and burn slash, jackpot burn, and understory burn. Units receiving these fuels reduction treatments sustained less severe fire damage than untreated areas.

Units which did not receive fuels treatment now appear to have less fuel on the ground because it was consumed more completely in the wildfire than units which did receive fuels treatment and had less complete consumption of the fuels on the ground. However, the overstory in the untreated units is now dead while the treated units have live trees. In units that were wide enough, the interior trees appear unscathed.

Grizzly Camp stop - Most of the trees in visible from Grizzly Camp appear dead. There is a litter layer of needles on the ground which may have protected the soil from erosion this last winter, as no rill or gully erosion is evident. The burned stand is clearly not providing LSR values at this time.

Issues and observations - Horse Linto Creek watershed is almost entirely in late-successional reserve status (LSR RC-305). This status constrained the types and extent of fuels treatment allowed. e.g. ladder fuels in the blowdown affected stands could not be removed; untreated (high fuel load) riparian zones dissected fuels treatment units; snags had to be provided within fuels treated units (snags are good for wildlife but problems for fire control).

There are more areas of blowdown and high fuel hazard that were not burned in the Megram Fire remain to be treated. However, attention and resources are now diverted to treating the wildfire affected areas.

The prediction is that with no treatment the dead trees and vegetation will be coming down and creating fuels and fire hazard in the next 10 years. There is evidence from the Klamath National Forest (Hog Fire, etc.) that

we might expect another wildfire every 10 years as fuel (both dead and live in the form of grass and brush) created by the last wildfire. There is also evidence that the size of the subsequent wildfires expands because the amount of fuel promotes a breakout of the wildfire from its previous boundaries.

The focus of post-wildfire treatments is community protection and watershed protection from erosion. Reducing future wildfire hazard, restoring wildlife habitat, or protecting streamcourses from debris jams has lower priority.

Harvest of the burned trees which have commercial value can fund the treatment of dead trees and fuels which do not have commercial value. However, the commercial value of the burned trees will decline over the next few years as insects and decay set in. This is especially true of the white fir (the majority of the trees killed) and less so of the Douglas-fir. Thus, a decision must be made regarding capturing the commercial value of the burned trees very soon or the issue will become moot.

There is concern about the impacts of salvage logging on soils - erosion, compaction. Are there harvest methods (aerial, helicopter) that could be used to minimize ground disturbance? What should the stand and ground surface look like in a harvest operation that protects the soil and watershed?

There is also the concern that salvage logging will remove commercially valuable timber but not treat the slash/fuels adequately or that plans will not be followed through to treat the slash/fuels.

There is an opportunity to study the recruitment of LWD to streams as the fire killed trees fall. There is also the opportunity to study the impacts of doing nothing to treat the fuels or reestablish forest on fire hazard and wildlife habitat recovery.