



Colorado State Forest Service
5060 Campus Delivery
Colorado State University
Fort Collins, CO 80523-5060
(970)491-6303; FAX (970)491-7736
<http://www.cfs.colostate.edu>

NEWS

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Contact: Kathryn Hardgrave

970.217.6850

kathryn.hardgrave@colostate.edu

Fuels Reduction Project Work Moves to Perins Peak

DURANGO, Colo. – Fuels reduction work will begin along the top of Perins Peak in August. Funded by an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act sub-grant from the Colorado State Forest Service, the Colorado Division of Wildlife in Durango is using machinery to create fuelbreaks in the Perins Peak State Wildlife Area. The fuelbreaks will influence fire behavior and give firefighters more tactical options to contain wildfires that occur north of U. S. Highway 160 and west of Durango.

In the absence of fire, Gambel oak dominates the landscape, crowding out grass and providing a ladder for fire to climb into ponderosa pine trees. When the CDOW began the fuels reduction project in July, the backdrop to Durango Ridge Ranch changed. The once solid-green blanket of oak brush seen from U.S. Highway 160 became a mix of openings and oak clumps near the ridgeline.

Removing patches of oak brush mimics the pattern a low-intensity fire might create. Grasses and forbs are restored, creating a diverse food source for all wildlife, including a winter food source for deer and elk. “Depending on the amount of moisture we receive this summer, benefits from the treatment should last seven to 15 years,” says Trevor Balzer, CDOW Durango district wildlife manager. “The more rain, the more the oak sprouts.”

Two hydro-axes, operated and owned by Rue Logging, Inc., created the mosaic that currently stretches over 600 acres. A hydro-axe is a large piece of equipment with a front-end attachment that resembles a six-foot diameter lawn mower blade. The whirling blade descends upon an oak clump leaving only stubs and mulch. What would take a 10-person chainsaw crew a day to complete, the hydro-axe can accomplish in an hour or less.

The equipment will move to Perins Peak in August to break up the continuity of oak brush on 575 acres. “The actual move date is weather dependent, but we anticipate it will be mid-August” said Randy Lewis, contract administrator for the project.

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Multiple hydro-axes will operate two to three days in the vicinity of County Roads 207 and 208 before moving into the backcountry. Signs will be posted and traffic will be controlled while machinery is in operation near the county roads.

The public is asked to stay out of areas being actively treated. If you encounter a work area, please remain at least 300 yards away from operating machinery and safely exit the area. The Perins Peak project will be active until mid-October 2010.

In addition to the hydro-axe treatment, low-intensity fire may be used to help reinvigorate grasses and forbs. Fires in dense, over-grown oak brush are more intense than fires that occurred prior to the days when active fire suppression became the accepted practice. Before the solid-green blanket of oak reestablishes itself, the CDOW hopes to apply low-intensity fire that will help maintain openings and enhance benefits to vegetation, wildlife and area landowners.

Specific information on the Perins Peak fuels reduction project is available from the CDOW Durango area office at 970.247.0855. General wildfire mitigation information is available on the CSFS website at www.csfs.colostate.edu.

ARRA funds were awarded to the CSFS by the U.S. Forest Service. The Recovery Act provided the U.S. Department of Agriculture with nearly \$28 billion in funding; of that, \$1.15 billion has been allocated to the U.S. Forest Service for project work nationwide in forest restoration, hazardous fuels reduction, construction and maintenance of facilities, trails and roads, green energy projects and grants to states, tribes and private landowners.

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Carpet of oak shrub becomes clumps of oak



Hydro-axe on the project

