



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

Winter Park Cuts ‘Ribbon of Dead Trees’

WINTER PARK, Colo. – A crew is cutting trees within the 200-foot wide Union Pacific Railroad easement in the town of Winter Park to mitigate wildland fuels. The fuels reduction project, identified in the Upper Fraser Valley Community Wildfire Protection Plan, is funded by an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act sub-grant from the Colorado State Forest Service.

The town has been implementing fuels reduction projects since 2002. “When you looked down at Winter Park from the Corona Pass Road, there was a ribbon of dead trees with completed forest management projects on both sides,” said Drew Nelson, town manager. “This project ties everything together.” After much dialog between town and railroad officials, Union Pacific not only offered its cooperation, it waived contract fees and provided a flagman.

Five contractors bid on the fuels reduction project. Willow Creek Logging, LLC, located in Grand County, was awarded the contract and in June began work at Kings Crossing, the north terminus of the project. An eight-person crew will work within the first 100 feet on each side of the railroad tracks. All lodgepole pine trees within the first 50 feet of the easement centerline will be cut to eliminate the risk of trees blowing down on the track. The remaining 50 feet on each side of the tracks will be cleared of dead trees and live lodgepole pine trees larger than 4 inches in diameter; aspen, spruce and fir trees will be left standing.

A Winter Park forestry crew led by Stefan Petersen, town forester, marked more than 11,000 trees that will be cut along the 3.1-mile project. Willow Creek now is mechanically cutting the trees, moving them to a location with road access, and using chain saws to limb and cut the trees to a specified length before loading the logs onto a truck. Tree tops and branches less than 4 inches in diameter will be piled near a road. The town forestry crew and two trucking contractors then will haul the remaining debris to the town burn site.

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To keep the crew safe, a Union Pacific flagman maintains contact with the 18 to 24 trains that use the track daily. The flagman notifies the logging crew in advance of an approaching train, which allows both crew and train to operate safely.

On an average workday, 400 trees are cut, 300 cubic yards of tree debris are hauled to the town burn site and eight tons of debris are burned using the town air curtain burner. Town officials hope to complete the ARRA project by the end of July.

Winter Park was one of three Colorado communities awarded a Community Wildfire Protection Plan Development and Implementation sub-grant from the CSFS in November 2009. The U.S. Forest Service provided the funds to the CSFS through a competitive grant process.

As the town manager and staff walk the railroad easement, Nelson comments, "Look at that area below the easement that was cut two years ago. The aspen are already two feet tall." The emerging forest, now cleared of mountain pine beetle-infested lodgepole pine, is still abundant with life.

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