

# Prescribed Burn Conducted at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

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The Colorado Desert District (CDD) in close coordination with CAL Fire, successfully conducted a joint-agency prescribed burn on approximately 126-acres on Middle Peak at Cuyamaca Rancho State Park on May 21<sup>st</sup>.

The goals of the prescribed burn were to reduce heavy fuels and to clear space to plant seedlings for the Cuyamaca Rancho State Park Reforestation Project. The Reforestation Project is an effort to restore the mixed conifer forest, at the headwaters of three San Diego County watersheds (the San Diego River, the Sweetwater River, the Tijuana River), which was destroyed in the 2003 Cedar Fire. Along with planting seedlings and restoring the forest habitat, reducing heavy fuels, a healthy forest management practice, decreases the possibility of extreme wildfire behavior and ensures that over time as the saplings grow taller and larger, they will be less vulnerable to accidental ignition.

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic health and safety restrictions, CDD Staff had to find creative ways to remain a separate work force while participating with CAL Fire during ignitions operations, and social distancing guidelines were followed under the circumstances. Twenty-four hours after initial ignition, CAL Fire transferred full responsibility to the CDD Fire Management Team, led by Joint Incident Commander and long-time State Parks Burn Boss, Frank Padilla, Jr., for the patrol and mop up operations. The CDD team had additional help from State Parks Fire Management Teams from San Luis Obispo and Inland Empire Districts, as well as the Mountains Resource and Conservation Authority.

Heavy fuels on the interior of the site may continue to smolder for several weeks after the ignition event and fire management staff worked round the clock for seven days and nights, patrolling for smokes to ensure they were interior to the plot and posed no threat to the control lines. All fire management personnel gained experience with managing fire in a heavy fuels environment, with newer staff being paired with seasoned leaders, as is standard operating procedure. The CDD Fire Management Team will continue to monitor the site to ensure a safe and successful burn.

The burned plot will be planted with native tree seedlings and this site, along with over 1600 acres which have already been reforested, will provide important forest habitat, protect and enhance watershed function, and become unique sky Island forests again for future generations to enjoy.

## Photos and Captions



A rising smoke plume is indication that ignition operations have begun on the morning of May 21<sup>st</sup>. In the foreground, a CAL Fire engine is positioned to assist with holding operations.



In a heavy fuels such as this, where there are many snags (standing dead trees) and downed logs, the fire will continue to burn for several weeks.



State Parks Fire Management staff patrol the site round-the-clock for seven days and nights. Colton Kegler, (Firefighter 1) listens to a briefing before beginning nighttime patrol.



Prescribed burn holding operations are supported by Madison Gilmartin (Firefighter 2) who uses a State Parks Type 6 engine to transport water to resupply a portable water tank near the site.



The goals of the prescribed burn were met as the fire has consumed most of the dead and downed wood and brush, providing open space and reducing the heavy fuels while leaving many of the oaks to survive and add to the diversity of the restored forest habitat.