

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Colorado State Forest Service Success Story Update

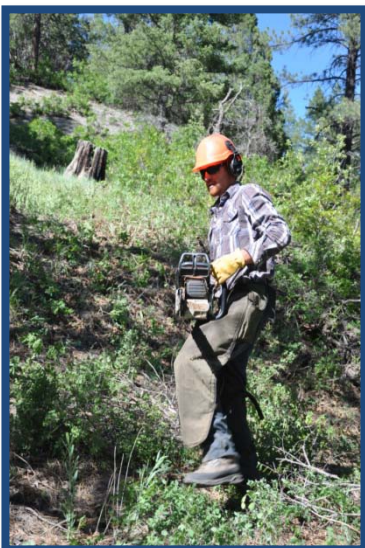
High-Priority Forest Restoration and Fuels Mitigation Grant



In June 2010, the Durango District of the Colorado Division of Wildlife (recently reorganized as Colorado Parks and Wildlife) began a 1,400-acre fuels reduction project in Perins Peak State Wildlife Area west of Durango. Two natural resource consultants in Durango administered the project. Hydro-axes owned by a South Fork business meandered through acres of Gambel oak, cutting the continuous carpet of oak shrub into a mosaic of oak clumps. Grass and forbs sprouted in the new openings. Wildlife moved through the vegetation easier. Neighboring subdivision residents were delighted with the results. Now, a prescribed fire or wildfire can be beneficial to the wildlife area.

In September, as the hydro-axes hopped the fence to continue fuels mitigation work on federal land, Horizon Environmental Services, Inc., arrived toting 30,000 ponderosa pine seedlings purchased by the Durango District. The locally owned business has a core team of 15 people. During the summer, the business employs as many as 40 people. When the planting crew began, the soil was a little dry; however, before half the seedlings were planted, welcome rain delayed the crew's work because the wet, unimproved road was slick. "It was a good job," said Levi Mead, vice president of Horizon Environmental Services. "How many people can say that what they do today will be around 200 years from now?"

Maria Irwin, a forest ecologist with Ecosphere Environmental Services since 2007, managed the planting project. She located protected planting sites that would stay moist longer, while minimizing pine seedling and oak competition. Seedlings were planted as groves rather than in rows. "The planting and mowing at Perins Peak State Wildlife Area and surrounding lands are good examples for the community of Durango to see landscape-scale management," said Irwin. Later in the fall, Irwin worked with the City of Durango on its first fire mitigation project using hydro-axes. The planting project sustained 15 jobs.



In June, the last piece of work funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act got underway. Contractor Danny Klatt owns a tree service company in Durango that takes him to both urban and forest settings. He is cutting brush for Colorado Parks and Wildlife—the first step in creating a control line for a proposed prescribed burn. He cuts a 10-foot swath and throws the



brush onto the side that will not be burned. Cutting fire line is nothing new to Klatt, a former Alaskan smoke jumper and San Juan Hotshot crewmember, but he says "it's still hard work." Protective gear on and chainsaw running, he cuts a shrub and then, still bent over, he pivots to cut the next one. He's back to work.

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