

Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: Pile Burning
Mop-Up Options

Date: March 20, 2015

Location: Trabuco Ranger District,
Cleveland National Forest



NARRATIVE

On March 20 the Trabuco Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest implemented a pile burn along the South Main Divide Road. While this Rx burn was cut short due to unfavorable winds, many of the piles were ignited before the operation was cancelled.

During the burn, the opportunity to utilize two different mop-up techniques side-by-side was applied. One pile was checked using water. The other was allowed to burn completely while being “stoked” using hand tools. (The adjacent photos illustrate the difference.)

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While it may seem common knowledge to let our prescribed fires burn down as long as possible before we initiate mop-up actions, this seldom seems to happen. There is often an urge to start mop-up as quickly as possible. However, time constraints and resource availability often dictate that we do otherwise.

Under many circumstances, allowing combustion to occur completely can drastically reduce time needed for mop-up, as well as reduce water usage. This practice can be particularly useful when burning piles.

Know Burn Plan Objectives

To accommodate this notion it is paramount that the “folks on the ground” have a solid understanding of the objectives set forth in the burn plan. Allowing 80-100



Both piles (above) approximately one hour from ignition time. Note the smoke production from the pile where water had been intermittently used vs. the pile in the foreground in which no water was used. (“X” indicates the gallons of water used to achieve the same mop-up goal as the pile that required no water.)



The water used to “cool the edge” halted consumption of most fuels on the fringe of the pile.

percent combustion of the pile may or may not be an objective. If this is an objective, ensure that it happens.

Prematurely extinguishing piles and leaving a few charred sticks may seem trivial. But, if you have a clear objective with resources in place and an allotted amount of time: Why not?

This may seem to be common knowledge, yet on many burns there is an urge to “fight” our prescribed fire as opposed to letting our fire work for us and better meet our objectives.

LESSONS/SUGGESTIONS

We, as a Forest and an Agency are held in high regard for our hard work and ethics. We tend to feel “out of place” if we are not hard at work. Simply standing next to a burning pile and taking lunch instead of feverishly mopping and stirring is hard for many of us to do. Yet, taking a step back and monitoring can be more effective and save time.

Better yet, to accommodate our inherent need to stay busy there is a solution. Actively “stoke” or “chunk” piles and rake coals to support the complete combustion of fuels. This technique, combined with letting the fire burn organically, can help with our “busy bee” mentality and better meet objectives.

If we can apply this knowledge it will greatly help with our fuels objectives and keep our folks safe. Less water use means less equipment on the road and less mop-up time means cost savings.

This RLS Submitted By:

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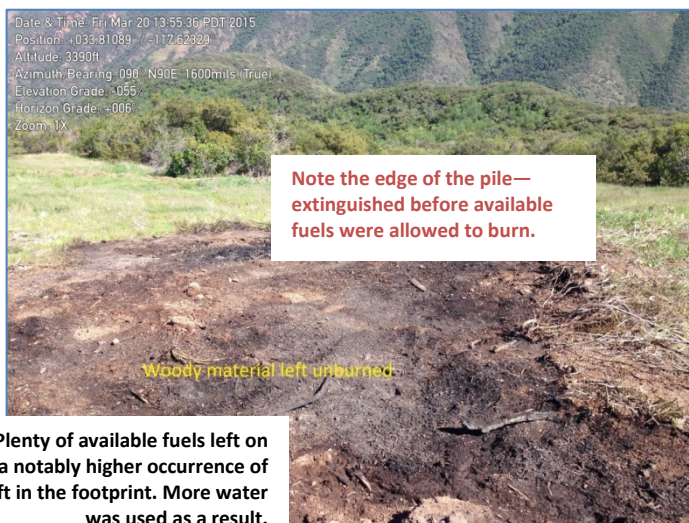
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Very little smoke left on the pile where fire was sustained. Note the more complete consumption and little fuels on the fringe of the pile from “chunking”.



Pile is mopped-up. Coals that remain are smaller. Mostly woody material is consumed. Less water was used and mop-up time was reduced.



Pile is mopped-up. Plenty of available fuels left on the periphery and a notably higher occurrence of woody material left in the footprint. More water was used as a result.