



Gasquet Community Fire Protection Successes

The community of Gasquet, nestled in the heart of the Smith River National Recreation Area, Six Rivers National Forest, has been identified as a community at risk. Fuels reduction activities have been implemented to protect this community, beginning in the spring of 1996 when the Gasquet Shaded Fuelbreak was burned. This prescribed fire targeted smaller branches, twigs and needles that contribute to fire spread. The reduction in fuels proved to be critical when, in September 1996, the Panther Fire threatened Gasquet. The Panther Fire, pushed by a strong east wind, almost forced evacuations of the community. When the fire burned into an area that had received prescribed fire treatment the year before, fire behavior moderated, allowing fire crews to contain the advancing head of the fire. No structures were lost or damaged.



Vegetation before treatment.



Treated area, before pile burning.

Having lived through the Panther Fire and seeing first hand the effectiveness of fuels treatment, community members and the Forest Service began to work together to assess fuel loadings surrounding the community. A result of their efforts was the identification of a series of fuelbreaks around the community designed to facilitate fire control efforts.

During summer 2001, three contracts were awarded to treat 298 acres in strategic locations within these fuelbreaks. Treatments included cutting brush and small diameter hardwood and conifers, piling and burning. National Fire Plan dollars funded these contracts, which were designed with the objective of developing local contractors to accomplish the work. Eighty-one acres have been completed thus far.

This year, Gasquet was once again threatened by wildfire, which resulted in a voluntary evacuation of the community. Again, no structures were lost or damaged. A contingency fireline was constructed north of town during the suppression of the Biscuit Fire. This contingency line may provide opportunities in the future to improve the defensible space around this community.