



## Four-Legged Fuels Force

Creation of fuel breaks is a common method used to slow or stop wildland fires. Five years ago the Mule Town Fuel Break was completed near Igo, California in an effort to protect the community. Fuel breaks are as dynamic as the wildlands they're cut into, they require maintenance in order to remain effective. In five years, considerable brush and tree sprouts had begun to re-vegetate the Mule Town Fire Break, compromising its original effectiveness. Therefore, the Redding BLM Field Office began considering various maintenance options including use of herbicides and burning. The risks and negative side effects of these methods led to another option, a herd of hungry goats!

In May 2002, 650 goats were contracted to eat their way through 40 acres of regrowth spread along 3 miles of fuel break. They ate the fine fuels such as grass, dead pine needles and leaves as well as the larger resprouting vegetation like manzanita, small trees, and blackberry bushes. They even ate poison oak and non-native noxious weeds like star thistle. They also consumed the lower limbs of larger trees, reducing ladder fuels and mimicking the effects of fire pruning.



The use of goats for this maintenance effort was a total success. The fuel break has been rethinned with little or no risk versus burning. There were no worries about smoke, fire escape, patrolling, ordering resources, weather, air quality, lengthy burn planning process, or the potential of killing residual trees within the fuel break.

Goats have proven their ability on this project. As a result, it's expected that the goats will return for use on adjacent fuel breaks next year!

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