

Hazardous fuels plan completed

By Victoria Metcalf
Staff Writer

Writing a contract for homeowners in the Indian Falls community became a project in working with diverse personalities.

Forester Brian Wayland wasn't dealing with the concerns and specific requirements of a single property owner, but many in an 11 acre fuel treatment project.

In a recent tour of the Indian Falls fuel treatment area, members of the Plumas County Fire Safe Council, foresters and interested people, viewed completed portions.

According to Wayland, ultimately approximately 60 acres will be thinned to reduce ladder fuels and ground debris and lessen the threat of catastrophic wildland fires.

Pointing to a section of private land that didn't fall under the scope of this project, Wayland indicated what he described as "dog hair," timber that was fine and thick. With a mass of saplings and small trees, dead underbrush, leaves and branches, Wayland pointed out that this kind of situation is set to burn hot and quick.

Greenville Fire Chief Jim Hamblin knows exactly what that kind of fire can do. "A few years ago we stopped a fire from coming up the hill," he said about his department's activities with wild-land fire. A known factor in fighting wildland fire is that it burns

uphill. If a little wind moves it, it spreads rapidly.

Land on the uphill side of this overgrown, unmanaged area, had been thinned and cleared to leave a landscape that property owners can live with.

"So they mostly left the oak," said John Sheehan, Fire Safe Council member, as he surveyed this portion of the treated project.

"Left the oak," Wayland agreed, adding that property owners wanted even small oaks to remain, and some of the sapling evergreens. They preferred that look compared to an even-ago management approach.

Wayland said that initially, some of the homeowners seemed skeptical about

but existing timber would grow better.

Plans were written and rewritten to meet the concerns of individual homeowners, Wayland said. Even after the contracts were completed, more adjustments were made in some areas to please property owners.

Wayland explained that it got down to determining which individual trees would remain. Sometimes it was one species versus another, but at other times concerns focused on a particular tree. Its location, sentimental attachment and other factors were considered.

Even those who insisted that their privacy not be disturbed, got some of their property treated, while some of it remained a little thicker than in other areas.

Wayland said that on the Indian Falls project he knew they wouldn't be using mechanical means to thin the timber. The debris was chipped and spread out in the new sections, adding a composting element to benefit the forest floor.

Wayland said that because of the density of the timber — about 2,000 trees per acre — he was initially concerned about the amount of chips that would end up on the ground.

Showing the group how it worked out, Wayland said the chipping didn't create a problem.

But before the landowner talks began or the chipping was a concern, Wayland worked with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection on federal and requirements. Wayland said



Eleven acres at Indian Falls now looks like a park-like setting. Fire Safe Council coordinator Mike DeLasaux looks over the work that a forester planned and a contractor carried out. Thinning dense timber stands to remove ladder fuels and clearing vegetative debris helps protect the small community from wildfire.

Photos by Victoria Metcalf

becoming involved in the treatment process. Many were fond of their forests and wanted the privacy offered by thick timber.

Others began to see the benefits of the treatment program. They came to realize that not only would their homes be safe from a wild-land fire,

that what they handled was a full-known national environmental analysis/documentation process known as NEPA. "Mine was a little overkill," he said, but he's more comfortable being too prepared than not enough.

In the Indian Falls project, several archaeological sites exist, which were protected through the NEPA process. Plants and animals weren't an issue in this location.

"It sure does look nice," Sheehan said before moving from one location to another. "It sure is a dramatic contrast," said Jerry Hurley, a coordinator for the Plumas County Fire Safe Council.

Wayland said that initially it was tough to just walk the boundaries because of the

dense growth.

Now with a little prescribed fire planning every year, property owners can manage to keep the areas clear.

"It was a never ending problem with brush before," Wayland said. Some of the property owners attempted to do some work each year, but they just couldn't keep up with the amount of work that needed to be done. "Historically, this has been all mining," Wayland explained about early use of the project land, "They worked this area pretty hard."

Continuing to discuss the scope of this project and the special issues, Hurley said that traditionally ladder fuels are discouraged. This means removing the small timber and ground fuels to

prevent fire from spreading to large trees. In this case, in the event of a wildland fire, property owners might lose a few of the smaller trees, Fire could also claim a few of the larger trees if it gets from the small timber into them, but the fire hazard has been diminished because of the reduction treatment.

"It's a good piece-of work for 11 acres," Sheehan said. He wants to see it when the other 50 acres are treated.

Editor's note: This is [the second in a four part series on recent treatment plans by the Plumas County Fire Safe Treatment Council.