

Northwest Regional RC&D Hazardous Fuels Program

Northwest Resource Conservation and Development is located in Western and Northern portion of Montana. It is bordered on the east by Glacier National Park, on the north by Canada and on the west by Idaho. The area is heavily timbered with a rich history of wildfires. Recent large wildfires have moved through the area from 1985 to the present time. Insects and disease across large landscapes created heavy down and dead fuels that accumulated on the ground. These downed fuels provided the means for the large fires to burn.

In 2004, Northwest Resource Conservation and Development began applying for, and receiving grants for treating hazardous fuels across Lincoln, Sanders and Flathead Counties. Throughout the years the program has been very successful in treating areas for defensible space, ingress and egress, as well as providing safe areas for firefighters if they were needed.

The largest issue that came up was trying to treat fuels in traditional ways, such as piling and burning. Most of all of Northwest Montana is in sensitive air sheds and some are even in non-attainment areas for Air Quality. Traditional burning of slash piles is no longer the preferred treatment. Since burning offered land owners the lowest cost for treatment, RC&D was faced with trying to develop a new cost effective way to treat fuels.

The first efforts were to use mulching heads on equipment. This method works well and



is effective. Its biggest limit is that it does not work well with trees larger than three inches in diameter, and is limited on steep ground.

The next effort was to develop a biomass removal program, where down fuels were actually recycled and used for other products. These fuels are utilized as post and poles, hog fuel, pulp chips, landscaping chips, firewood, and in some cases cut into lumber by portable sawmills. About one-third to one-half of all landowners uses the biomass removal to reduce burning.

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