

Cal-IPC Symposium 2004
FIRE WORKING GROUP
Friday, October 8, 2004

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Topic Leader: Joe DiTomaso
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Joe DiTomaso announced that a monograph should be available by next year's Cal-IPC symposium resulting from a workshop held in Las Vegas on the use of fire for control of invasive plants. The workshop was put on by the Center for Invasive Plant Management. There will be chapters on use of prescribed fire to control invasive plants based on life cycle, ecology, etc.; use of fire in an IPM strategy. A literature review on the use of fire for invasive plant control is being compiled by Peter Rice at the University of Montana.

Then we had people introduce themselves and briefly state their interest in use of fire in regard to weed control.

- Tom Dudley – biocontrol beetles have been used to defoliate tamarisk, then fire was used to finish off the job in Northern Nevada. However, if knapweed and *Lepidium* are in the understory, they may benefit.
- Would like to know how fire has been used for yellow starthistle (YST) and how this may relate to Sudden Oak Death.
- Concerned with good fuelbreak design to minimize spread of weeds.
- Preserve design in San Diego: use fire to replace grazing and use in habitat management to control non-native bromes.
- A fire management plan is being prepared for San Diego: which exotics follow fire? Concern about creation of fuelbreaks.
- Use of fire against YST and Italian thistle.
- CDF is proposing fuelbreaks in areas containing broom.
- Jo Kitz: in the Santa Monica Mountains, they are managing formerly disked areas by mowing. There is an MOU for Cold Creek Preserve with the Fire Dept. allowing not to clear 200 feet. Planted *Nassella pulchra* – using native grasses to manage fuelbreak. Urgent need for prompt response after fires, survey and remove invasive plants before it exploded in the burned area. Use volunteers perhaps. They removed red gum eucalyptus before they had a chance to spread too much.
- When you burn for broom and YST control and don't plan it well, fire can make the infestations worse. There is a lot of pressure currently for fuelbreak expansion, worried about seed bank explosion after prescribed burning of broom.
- Tony – MRCA – Piro Creek in Santa Clara watershed – fire damage and subsequent recovery. Interested in how to construct fuelbreaks.
- How fire suppression impacts habitat.
- How to step down to small burns for restoration.
- Italian rye near seasonal wetland.

- Promotion of non-natives, increasing fire frequencies – difference between pile and broadcast burning – invasions of cheatgrass in higher elevation forests after prescribed burns.
- Mastication good for preventing weeds because it results in thick mulch and few weeds. Not always good for fire prevention because fuels on ground have a higher surface/volume ratio and can burn more easily than with some other fuels treatments.
- Concern over post-fire weed invasions / spread.
- Fire and bull thistle, hemlock, French broom.
- Use of National Fire Plan funding for community fuelbreaks – potential for weed spread
- Kurt Schasker believes low elevation chaparral (< 4500 feet) can't tolerate fire, questions the idea that prescribed burning of chaparral helps make communities fire safe.
- Stephen's kangaroo rat habitat – they prefer open areas. A prescribed burn was carried out near a new airport where they couldn't use livestock to open up the habitat.
- Fire frequencies at Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area have been too high, result is type conversion to laurel sumac and annual grassland. A fire management plan for the SMNRA is available (Marti Witter).
- Witter: Burned Area Emergency Rehabilitation funds are available to control post-fire invasives.
- Robert (SMNRA): concerns about scale of burning. Stopped by Ventura County Air Quality office – he'd like to do mustard control. Fire District plans fires on NPS lands without consulting NPS.
- Fire used to reduce ripgut brome and encourage native annual forbs. Used on *Ammophila* and then sprayed. Also in old growth redwood forest to reduce litter depth.
- Concern about how invasives can spread fire: e.g. *Arundo* in riparian areas. Did herbicide treatment after fire and it didn't work. (Joe D. says timing is crucial for controlling resprouting *Arundo*, must not be done too early).

There were 3 recurring themes brought up by the participants:

- Fuelbreaks and the potential for spread of invasive plants
- Invasions caused or exacerbated by fire
- How to use fire to reduce invasives

CONTINUING TO TRACK THE DISCUSSION:

Need to work with fire and fuels staff so they understand the problem of invasive plants

Re: burning for weed control: Timing and logistics can be difficult. May not be able to count on burning because of weather, fire danger, personnel availability, etc. Especially a problem if counting on late season burns, e.g. for yellow starthistle.

Use of fire retardants for fuelbreaks results in soil enrichment. There was a discussion about this becoming more of a common practice and some concern was voiced about environmental impacts of using retardants as a preventive tool in addition to its use in extinguishing fires.

Question for group: Asked if anyone in the group knows of proven instances where prescribed burning of lowland chaparral has effectively reduced fuels and met resource enhancement objectives; where burning was clearly better than doing nothing? Some people answered yes, they have reduced fuel and now have the plants they wanted.

Pretreatment to create shaded fuelbreaks has worked to stop fires.

Kyle Merriam (USGS) – research was conducted at 14 sites around California on the effects of fuelbreaks on the spread of invasives. This study can be found on the web site for the Western Ecological Research Center: <http://www.werc.usgs.gov/fire/seki/ffm/>

IDEAS ON ACTIONS THE WILDLAND COMMUNITY CAN TAKE:

1. We should use this workshop to start a network; we couldn't discuss all the issues in this short time.

(If we had stuck to the topic in the title of the working group: “using prescribed burning as a management tool”, the working group session would probably have been more focused and productive. At least there would have been more time for discussing solutions to the problems / questions people brought up. However, this seemed to be the forum for many people to express concerns about the potential for the spread of weeds as a result of fuels reduction treatments as well as after prescribed and wild fires. Perhaps next year, the working groups could be structured to include these topics. JC.)