



MULTIPLE PROJECTS ARE UNDERWAY TO REDUCE HAZARDOUS FUELS IN STATE PARKS February 2005

The severity of the 2002 fire season grabbed the attention of Lyle Laverty, director of Colorado State Parks. As a result, Colorado State Parks is partnering with the Colorado State Forest Service to implement an ambitious multi-year fuels reduction plan to reduce the threat of wildland fire and improve wildlife habitat and the condition of Colorado's forests. The project is being done under the auspices of the Front Range Fuels Treatment Partnership.

Staunton State Park is located along Highway 285 and straddles the border between Jefferson and Park counties. The Pike National Forest is directly adjacent on the north and private homes border all other sides. Residential developments in the area have expanded quickly and present a challenge to firefighter safety and community protection. Because of Staunton's location within the Red Zone, Laverty chose the 3,700-acre park to be the first for treatment. And because the park has not yet been developed, it's an ideal time to implement the landscape mitigation strategy. As the map shows, several wildfires in recent years were close to the park.

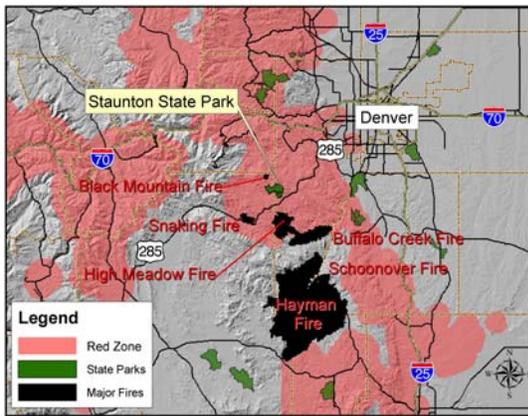


Figure 1 Regional map showing major fires near Staunton State Park

A forest inventory of the area conducted in summer 2002 revealed that the forest was impacted by past logging activity, years of fire suppression and a decline in forest health.

Although the area contained some old-growth ponderosa pine trees, the forests were dense with highly mixed species composition. Mountain pine beetle and dwarf mistletoe were providing less open woodland habitat than would have existed there historically. Dog hair stands of lodgepole also presented serious fire danger on steep hillsides, and mixed conifers suppressed the growth of aspen stands. The inventory also revealed opportunities to improve the health and viability of the forest while reducing the fuel hazard. For example:

- Patch cuts in lodgepole pine will reduce the potential of fire spreading from federal lands and provide opportunities for aspen to regenerate and create good elk habitat.
- Selective removal of conifers from areas with aspen will improve elk habitat and maintain stand diversity.
- Thinning the ponderosa pine will create a fuelbreak in the center of the park, and many of the old growth trees can be retained while opening the area to create a woodland park. Thinning also will provide more resistance to pine beetle and mistletoe over time and improve the area aesthetically.
- Prescribed fire in the understory will be implemented to remove surface fuels and maintain understory vegetation critical for soil maintenance and nutrient recycling.



Figure 2 Mixed conifer forest before thinning

Implementation of the fuels mitigation project at Staunton is now well underway. “We are pleased with the results in terms of the balance between the reduction of wildfire hazard, improvements to the ecological health of the forest and the maintenance of the viewshed that is essential to a state park,” Lavery said.

“Mitigation projects being implemented in Colorado State Parks are accomplished through a variety of management strategies,” said Scott Woods, assistant project forester, Colorado State Forest Service. Examples include timber harvesting with logging contractors, thinning operations with the Youth Corps, piling and burning debris and prescribed burning. “These strategies are cost effective and help reduce wildfire risk, improve resource sustainability and enhance the scenic quality of park resources,” Woods said.

“Mitigation projects being implemented in Colorado State Parks are accomplished through a variety of

Fuels reduction projects are now underway at Golden Gate Canyon State Park and planning is underway for projects at several parks along the Front Range including Cheyenne Mountain, Mueller, Lory, Roxborough and Eldorado.



Figure 3 Ponderosa woodland after thinning



Figure 4 Mountain meadow at Staunton after Youth Corps