OLYMPIC VALLEY
PUBLIC SERVICE DISTRICT

OLYMPIC VALLEY SOUTH RIDGE ("OV-5") FUEL REDUCTION PROJECT

Project Description:

The proposed project, "OV-5", is one of five fuel breaks identified as priority projects in the Olympic Valley Community Wildfire Protection Plan. Cumulatively, the fuel breaks will total approximately 400 acres located upon ridgelines immediately north and south of the community, along the Wa She Shu Creek corridor and adjacent to the community's residential areas.

The OV-5 project is a 100-acre fuel reduction project located along the south ridge of the community of Olympic Valley (between Olympic Valley and Alpine Meadows). It is located fully on private property and wholly within the Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone.

This fuel break will be implemented utilizing mechanical and hand thinning methods with mastication of surface and ladder fuels, where needed, such that flame length, intensity, rate of spread, and potential duration of wildfire will be significantly reduced. This project provides protection for the approximately 900 habitable structures in Olympic Valley, structures in Alpine Meadows, as well as improved safety along the major evacuation routes of Olympic Valley Road, Alpine Meadows Road, and State Route 89. OV-5 also connects to the US Forest Service's "Alpine Meadows Hazardous Fuel Reduction Project", a 700-acre project located along the southern edge of OV-5. Further, the proposed project will also complement Placer County's 144-acre Cabin Creek Fuels Reduction and Community Safety Project, and the over 6,000-acre USFS Five Creeks Project, both located north of OV-5.

Project Objectives:

Project objectives include 1) Creation of the OV-5 fuel break upon 100 acres adjacent to the community of Olympic Valley located along the ridgeline to the immediate south of community, and adjacent to the arterial evacuation route for the community and region, 2) reduce wildfire's risk to human health and safety, and 3) reduce the risk of adverse wildfire effects and potential fire behavior (flame length, intensity, rate of spread, duration) through reduction of fuel loading and arrangement within the Defense Zone of the Olympic Valley Wildland Urban Interface.

The fuel break pretreatment areas are dominated by Sierra Mixed Conifer stand type of excessive stand density ranging from 180-220 square feet basal area per acre. Species composition is approximately 60% White Fir, 30% Jeffrey Pine, 6% Sugar Pine, and 4% Red Fir, with an average of 240 trees per acre over 8 inches DBH. The average stand diameter at breast height (DBH) of White Fir is 12.0", Jeffrey Pine is 14.3", Sugar Pine is 18.0", and Red Fir is 22.4". Cumulative pretreatment quadratic mean diameter is 13 inches DBH. Openings in the conifer overstory are dominated by native shrub species including manzanita and whitethorn and young growth White Fir regeneration under 3" DBH.

Following fuel break implementation utilizing mechanical thinning and mechanical mastication, stand conditions in each fuel break will exhibit reduced horizontal and vertical continuity of fuels such that wildfire intensity, including potential flame length, rate of spread, and duration of wildfire will be significantly reduced. This reduction in potential fire behavior provides for increased safety of residents and emergency personnel in a wildfire situation through reduced fire behavior.

Post-treatment stand conditions will exhibit reduced stand density of 75-100 square feet basal area per acre, depending on slope position, as a means to achieve these goals. The stand quadratic mean diameter will be increased approximately 5 inches DBH as trees retained will generally be larger, more fire tolerant trees. The residual stand will contain a species composition that provides for increased stand vigor and resilience to future disturbance such as fire, insects, disease, and drought. To this end, the relative site occupancy of White Fir will be reduced in favor of the more drought and fire tolerant native pine species. The residual stand will also exhibit lower crown bulk density and an increase in crown base height as a means to reduce fuel continuity and the probability of crown ignition and/or sustaining a running crown fire. Surface and ladder fuels will largely be removed through a combination of mechanical and hand thinning, and mechanical mastication.

Improved public safety through fuel reduction along arterial forest roads is another expected outcome of the project. This improved access will also provide for firefighter safety during ingress in the event of wildfire. Access roads leading from the Olympic Valley community to the ridgelines to the south and into the community of Alpine Meadows will be improved as part of forest product extraction involved with fuel break implementation. This improvement will likewise support ingress and egress of emergency personnel during a wildfire event.

Project Location: