THE SPARK

Wildfire Preparedness is Year Round

What Do We Mean by "Treatments"?

When land managers talk about "treating" an area, **they are talking about intentionally changing vegetation or fuels** to improve forest and watershed health, reduce wildfire risk, or help create safer conditions for communities and firefighters. A treatment does not mean removing all vegetation, and there is no single treatment that works everywhere. The right approach depends on the vegetation, terrain, values at risk, land-management objectives, and conditions on the ground.

What Does a Treatment Look Like?

Mechanical thinning: Removes selected trees and vegetation to reduce forest density and break up continuous fuels that can carry fire into tree canopies.

Hand thinning: Uses crews with chainsaws and hand tools to remove smaller trees, brush, and ladder fuels, especially where larger equipment cannot operate.

Mastication and chipping: Grind or chips woody vegetation, which is then deposited directly back into the area. Sometimes prescribed burning takes place in masticated areas to decrease dead and down vegetation post treatment.

Pile burning: Uses prescribed fire to consume woody material that has been cut and piled during previous thinning or fuels work.

Broadcast prescribed fire: Intentionally applies fire across a planned area under specific weather, fuel, and operational conditions to reduce accumulated fuels and restore fire to fire-adapted ecosystems.

HOW ARE TREATMENTS TRACKED?

The New Mexico Vegetation Treatment Mapping project is one way to view treatment information from multiple land-management agencies into a publicly accessible map.

- Users can explore completed, ongoing, planned, and historical projects and see how individual treatments fit into the larger landscape.
- The database contains information on more than 54,000 treatment projects across New Mexico, helping land managers, researchers, communities, and the public better understand where work has occurred.



Ponderosa pine forest after hand thinning and pile burning treatments in Glorieta, NM.

Why Do Land Managers Treat Vegetation?

Treatments often work best in combination. Further, the goal of treatments are not to prevent every wildfire. Fire is a natural and important part of many New Mexico ecosystems. Instead, treatments can help influence how fire behaves when it arrives. By reducing or rearranging fuels, treatments can decrease the potential for extreme fire behavior, improve opportunities for firefighters to respond safely and effectively, help protect communities and important infrastructure, and improve the resilience of forests and watersheds.

Treatments are not permanent. Vegetation grows back, grasses and needles accumulate, and forests continue to change. Maintaining previously treated areas through additional thinning or prescribed fire is an important part of long-term wildfire mitigation.

In summary, when you hear that an area has been "treated," it may mean thinning, chipping, mastication, pile burning, prescribed fire or several of these tools used together. Each treatment is one way land managers can reduce hazardous fuels and help New Mexico's landscapes and communities better prepare for wildfire and restore ecosystems.

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