

UC Valentine Reserve Fuels Management: A Smashing Success!

For many people Mammoth Lakes is synonymous with winter recreation, so you might be surprised to know that before fire suppression became routine, a given spot of ground in Mammoth Lakes burned on average every 15-25 years depending on the slope and aspect.

Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserve, a portion of the University of California's Natural Reserve System, sits at the wildland-urban interface between the town of Mammoth Lakes and the Inyo National Forest. The land occupied by the Reserve last experienced fire over 160 years ago. Since then, many of the Reserve's 156 acres have been covered by dense forest and heavy fuel accumulation. Reversing that trend, the Reserve staff has worked with the Inyo National Forest, Mammoth Lakes Fire Protection District, CAL FIRE, and others, to plan fuel reduction efforts, and for the past six years a transformation has begun. Each summer, after the skiers have headed down the mountain, the faculty and staff of the Reserve have gone to work teaching college students, facilitating graduate research, and hosting weekly summer courses for elementary school students. In addition, they have coordinated a project to improve forest health and reduce the risk that wildfire could pose to the Reserve and the surrounding community. This effort has continued in 2011 with a grant from the California Fire Safe Council under which the Reserve is now treating an additional 20 acres of difficult terrain with very high fuel loads.

Thinning and fuel reduction at the Valentine Reserve have created a more open forest that can moderate potential fire behavior, but that's not the end of the story. The reserve has used the opportunity that being surrounded by a resort community presents to develop commodity streams for the products resulting from the thinning work. While some logs are cut and sold as firewood, others have been sold and processed into lumber. During the most recent thinning, medium to large diameter logs in good condition and reasonably straight, were sold to Bob Drake Wood Milling, a local portable sawmill operator producing a wide variety of high end architectural products including posts, beams, slabs (bar and table tops), mantles, flooring, and siding. Small diameter logs were also sold for use as posts, table legs, railings, furniture construction and to a local golf course for rustic fence construction. By providing these products to the local market, the UC Valentine Reserve has helped to protect the community and given local homeowners, businesses, and visitors the opportunity to use and enjoy wood products from the forest nearby.



Above: Reserve Director Dan Dawson with a snag at the UC Valentine Eastern Sierra Reserve

Below: A portion of the UC Valentine Reserve after fuel reduction



The portable sawmill, and a slab table under construction at Bob Drake Wood Milling

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For more information please contact the California Fire Safe Council at (626) 335-7426 or go to www.firesafecouncil.org
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