AUBURN DAM AND STATE RECREATION AREA
FIRE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Introduction

This paper introduces the purpose and the need for a Comprehensive Fire Management plan for The Auburn Dam and Reservoir Project lands. It also discusses a Fire Management Planning Strategy that has been developed by representatives of the California Departments of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDF), California Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR), and The United States, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation). The development of certain elements of the fire planning strategy have been closely coordinated with the City of Auburn Fire Department and with a representative of The United States, Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Background

Reclamation is responsible for the management of The Auburn Dam and Reservoir Project lands, a project originally authorized by Congress in 1965. The total acreage within the project boundary is 42,000 acres. Of this, Reclamation has ownership for approximately 26,000 acres. The remaining acreage is owned by BLM, the United States Forest Service, and private parties. DPR and CDF have management authority over all Project lands through cooperative agreements with Reclamation. The total lands are known as the Auburn State Recreation Area and are operated by the State of California as a state recreation area.

Project lands within the American River watershed are largely comprised of two large river drainages, the North and Middle Forks of the American River that have carved over fifty miles of canyons within both Placer and El Dorado counties. Much of this area runs adjacent to the communities of Auburn and Foresthill, along with other residential developments. The oak-chaparral environment within this area can be highly combustible under certain dry conditions and the risk of wildland fires is a major concern as residential and visitor use activity continues to increase.

Because of these concerns, Reclamation is working with CDF and DPR to develop a Comprehensive Fire Management Plan for the Project Area. The development of this plan and its implementation is being greatly enhanced through appropriate coordination with local counties, communities, fire safe councils and other interest groups and jurisdictions. It may be appropriate to include both BLM and USFS lands within the Comprehensive Fire Plan. Funding mechanisms for the development of the Comprehensive Fire Management Plan have been identified as critical and needs further investigation.

The managing partners initiated the fire planning process for the ASRA lands in the summer of 2000. However, with the advent of a dry year in 2001, and the resulting high fire danger, concerns of local community leadership have reached high levels. In response, the managing partners are moving quickly to identify and implement appropriate actions. These actions are focusing on Reclamation Lands that interface with private property where certain priority conditions may exist.

A priority condition of great concern for the managing partners is residential density associated with these interface lands, such as the canyon rim adjoining the City of Auburn. It has been in response to this concern that the managing partners have focused on the Fuels Management Element of the Comprehensive Fire Plan for those interface lands.

A Fuels Management Action Plan has been developed, to not only be responsive to fire management concerns of the local interface areas, but also to be consistent with the broader goals and objectives of a comprehensive fire management plan for the ASRA. This plan will work to preserve and restore the natural resources and protect the cultural resources of the area. It is the intent of this strategy to implement the Fuels Management Action Plan for the priority interface lands, as soon as possible, consistent with the broader goals and objectives of the Comprehensive Plan. A major component for implementation is the selection of appropriate Demonstration projects to help ensure the viability of any fuels management activities.

It is vital to identify appropriate goals and objectives as a first step in the development of a comprehensive fire plan. The following is the product of much discussion, as the agencies integrated the needs for both fire protection and resource management.