

Elk Meadow newsletter article

Meadows are an extremely valuable natural ecosystem that provides multiple values to our landscape. Meadows reduce peak water flow after storms and during runoff, recharge groundwater supplies as they release water into the ground, protect streambanks and shorelines, filter sediments, and provide habitat for a wide variety of wildlife.

The SVRCD is implementing a project funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to restore 887 acres of meadow habitat at Elk Flat, Mud, and Bitterbrush meadows in the McCloud Flats area. This project was part of a larger planning effort carried out by the Mt Shasta McCloud Management Unit of the Shasta Trinity National Forest.



Elk Meadow prior to mastication treatment

These three meadows are classified as dry meadows meaning that they do not stay green during our long hot summers here in Siskiyou County. Dry meadows are created by a combination of soil deposition off of the slopes of Mt Shasta, dense “hardpan” soils, and regular fire removing trees and brush. Fire suppression over the past century has allowed brush and conifer to establish and decrease the size of these important habitats. Conifer encroachment is diminishing dry meadow areas at Elk Flat to less than 50 percent of its extent in 1944 as recorded by aerial photos taken at the time. According to the environmental documentation produced for this project, the desired condition is to reestablish early seral habitat in the meadows as they are restored to their historic footprint.

To achieve these objectives the SVRCD has hired contractors to masticate small diameter trees that have encroached in the meadow systems. The treatments would reestablish the dry meadow conditions of grass dominated habitat with occasional seasonal streams and wetlands. The project would also enhance the edge habitat between the forest and the meadow that is so important to Northern Spotted Owl and other raptors for forage opportunities.



Photo of area where brush has been masticated along with masticator

Due to the hot weather we have been experiencing Mud Creek has been running high with heavy volumes of silt as glaciers up on Mt Shasta quickly melt without their insulating blankets of snow that would normally be present this time of year. This melt water stirs up the volcanic ash and washes it out into these meadows where the silt is deposited. In this way along with the removal of the trees and brush the meadow is on the path to restoration. Next year grasses and sedges will push their way through the silt while other herbaceous plants seed into the openings. The Forest Service plans on burning the meadows over the next few years to maintain the processes that keep these meadows open and productive parts of the forest ecosystem.



Soil deposited (and thus rejuvenating) Mud Meadows due to Mud Creek overflowing its channel