

FIRE DAMAGE: Corridor on highway was hit hard by blaze

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private local contractors have been busy in the area of the burn, removing damaged trees and dead snags to reduce the danger to motorists, bicyclists, and hikers who will be using Highway 242 after the snow is cleared next spring. The Forest Service has specifically chosen local contractors for their knowledge of the area and to support them financially, as they were unable to work during forest closures due to high temperatures and then the fires.

In the first seven days, four crews, using mechanized feller-bunchers, and working long hours, were able to quickly remove trees in areas without steep slopes. The machinery grabs a tree, saws through the trunk, and swings it around to load. Then

hand-fallers were brought in to remove trees on the steep slopes using chain saws, and wedges to direct the falls. The trees are dropped and skidded to one location where equipment called the “shovel” picks them up and loads them on the log trucks.

The cleanup process has faced a number of challenges including the steepness of slopes on either side of the highway, very limited shoulders on the road, the fact that Highway 242 is a scenic byway with plants and wildlife to take into consideration, and the rapid approach of winter. Trucking the logs out has been a challenge because of the winding, narrow road with blind corners and no place to turn around.

The viable timber that is being removed will be sold commercially to help defray the cost of fire cleanup. Usually the logs are decked (stacked) onsite but, in the Milli operation, the logs are being “hot loaded” right onto

log trucks and driven down out of the burn because there is no place to store them. The timber is usable for lumber for up to two years and after that, any salvage is only suitable as firewood.

The Forest Service has been working quickly to get as much cleanup done as possible before the winter snows begin in earnest. They have already experienced a snowfall as well as two periods of rain showers which washed the soil — which has the consistency of flour — down across the highway, necessitating two cleanups. Logging was scheduled to be completed last Friday.

Now ODOT will come in to repair and clean out culverts, patch damaged areas of asphalt, and clean the narrow shoulders of the highway. Erosion of soil on steep slopes lacking vegetation will be a continual concern. In all probability Highway 242 will not reopen before its usual closing for the winter.

Peter Murphy, public information officer for ODOT, acknowledged that the snow gates can't keep snowmobilers, snowshoers, and cross-country skiers out of the area. He does want people to be aware of hidden dangers once the snow flies. Fallen trees and branches hidden by the snow will present safety hazards to recreationists who won't be able to see them under the snow. The weight of winter snows will bring down more trees and branches, creating falling hazards from above.

Osborne commented, “There is a ton of work to still do with prescribed burns and mechanical thinning. It is difficult to keep up with it and start new projects.”

Tinderholt indicated that due to damage to the Black Crater Trail, both by the fire and subsequent rains, it will not be open to the public next year.

“The foot tread is non-existent and has to be completely rebuilt and there will

be serious snag hazard in the area,” she said.

Although the section of the Pacific Crest Trail in the Sisters Ranger District was not significantly impacted by the Milli Fire, other sections were, due to other fires. There will be necessary logouts and erosion work done. Over the winter, discussions will be held about where to reroute the PCT while work is undertaken.

The Forest Service maintains a list of current trail and campground closures, so be sure and check before hiking or camping in the Sisters Ranger District.



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