



NEWS

Release

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Colville National Forest

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Togo Fire Salvage Sale a boon to local economies, as it restores fire-dependent forest ecosystems

Colville, Wash., -- Loggers began taking advantage of the deep snow and frozen roads in the Togo Fire in early January to harvest and remove trees killed by the fire that burned nearly 5,000 acres last August.

Forest officials report up to 30-40 truckloads of logs are being hauled to Vaagen's Lumber Co. in Colville every day since operations began in the Togo Fire Salvage Sale on January 5, 2004.

The timber sale is comprised of 758 acres of dead and dying Engelmann spruce, subalpine fir, western larch, Douglas-fir, lodgepole pine, western redcedar and grand fir -- identified and marked shortly after the fire burned.

According to Gary Nielsen, forestry technician for the Colville National Forest, timber marking crews from the Colville National Forest's Republic and Three Rivers Ranger Districts began assessing the damage before rain "had a chance to wet the ash."

Quick actions taken by the Colville National Forest to expedite the salvage sale assessment, design, timber marking and cruising, appraisals and advertisement have saved millions of dollars in timber value that may otherwise have been lost to a host of diseases that stain and break down wood fiber strength.

"Some of the dead lodgepole

pine has blue stain fungus that was present in the forest at the time of the fire," Nielsen said. "But most of the logs are sound and have retained most of their value."

Nielsen said that many of the small logs killed by fire will lose up to 90 percent of their value if not harvested within the first year following a wildfire.

As crews prepared the timber sale on the ground, a host of foresters and other natural resource specialists worked diligently to prepare an environmental assessment and obtain public comments for the salvage of the dead trees.

Forester Mike Roney said his greatest concern in the sale

area was soil compaction and displacement.

"Protecting soils is always a priority in any timber sale, particularly in burned-over areas," Roney said.

Roney said logging on top of the snow protects the soil from compaction. "The skidders, tractors and forwarders are operating on 20-30 inches of snow in the sale area," he said, "which is very good for the soils and vegetation in conventional logging operations." But, the deep snow is hard on the sawyers who are felling trees by chainsaw because they have to shovel snow from the bases of the trees to leave stumps less than 12 inches in height.

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More

Add One

Log trucks are traveling to the mill on snow or ice-covered roads. All roads into the timber sale area are closed to the public while the logging is being conducted because of heavy truck traffic and limited visibility along the winding logging roads to the timber sale.

Paper plates adorned with hot pink ribbon demark half-mile intervals along the Little Boulder Creek Road at which the log trucks warn approaching traffic of their locations.

Thus far, Roney said, the impact of traffic to roads has been minimal over the snow. The loggers are monitoring road conditions and have had to shut down hauling operations twice when lower-elevation roads started to break up early. But colder weather soon remedied the situation.

As spring breakup approaches, the snowplows will "wing off" the snow berms at the road edges to draw running water away from the road surfaces, Roney said.

Roney said there are ten different operations -- or "sides" -- presently working in the 15 million board foot sale. Each side consists of three or more machines that cut, skid and load the trees on to logging trucks, he said.

Helicopters will begin removing logs from 130 acres of inaccessible lands by the middle of February, Roney said. Then, we will continue monitoring and reinforcing restoration projects and begin planting trees and native vegetation on the burned-over slopes.

Early last fall, Burned Area Emergency Restoration crews laid mulch logs laterally across slopes to slow soil erosion and prepared plans for revegetating and restoring the area.

According to Roney, the Togo Fire did not cleanly burn the forest. "This was a 'dirty burn' that left patches of unburned or partially

Togo Fire leaves a mosaic on the landscape that will benefit wildlife, forest health

Amidst the blackened forest on the landscape of the Togo Fire are stringers and pockets of trees that escaped damage from the burn. These live trees will remain throughout the fire area to provide shelter and habitat diversity for the future.

Even though the fire burned extensively throughout the Little Boulder Creek drainage, much of the burned-over forest in steep, inaccessible areas will not be harvested. The dead trees will remain standing for 10-50 years until winds slowly

topple them amidst the naturally regenerating lodgepole pine, subalpine fir and Engelmann spruce forest.



(Above) Stands of unburned trees make up the green areas in the fire-blackened patchwork left by the Togo Fire. Only dead and dying trees are being harvested in the Togo Fire Salvage Sale.

TOGO FIRE SALVAGE SALE



(Right and Above) A feller buncher with a grapple shear, operated by Keith Dougherty, Swaggart Logging, John Day, Ore., works its way up a skid trail at 1 of 10 operation "sides" in the Togo Fire Salvage Sale area. (Right) Swaggart skyline logging operation viewed from below.



More ...

Add Two

burned trees," he said. "In the future, this mosaic will be great for wildlife -- especially deer winter range -- because of the close interspersed of hiding and thermal cover with new, available and nutritious forage."

Over all, the timber sale has been a boon to both the ecosystem and the economy, Roney said.

"There are loggers, sawyers, fellers, machine operators and truckers here from the Pacific Northwest working at this timber sale," he said. Most of them are spending their money here and supporting our local businesses by staying in local motels and purchasing goods, fuel and services.

According to Dave Keeley of the Kettle Falls Chamber of Commerce, the community has prospered from increased business brought to the area by the salvage sale.

"This is a very positive and valuable timber sale that is improving the health of the forest, the local economy and will continue to benefit many forest resources for a long time," Roney said.

Eight different logging companies -- 1 from Idaho, 1 from Oregon and the rest from northeast Washington -- are cooperating to increase the entire operation's efficiency.

According to loader operator Tony Patburg from Hansen Logging of Chewelah, there are no hard feelings about sharing the work with loggers from around the region.

"We have a lot of work to get done out here and we don't have a lot of time to do it until the wood loses its quality," Patburg said. "We are grateful to be working together to get the job done right," he said.

For more information about the Togo Fire Salvage Sale, please go to <http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville/forest/projects/togo.html> or call (509) 684-7000 or write the Colville National Forest at 765 South Main Street, Colville, Wash., 99114.

(Right, Top) Heavy chains are used for added traction for a rubber tire skidder, operated by Mark Hodgden of Hansen Logging, Chewelah. (Right, Middle) Keith Dougherity, Swaggart Logging, shovels snow from the base of a burned lodgepole pine. (Right) Dougherity's grapple shear's teeth are worn and broken when shear head hits boulders and rocks hidden by the snow. (Far Right) Dave Bennett.

Logging in the Winter The bitter-cold, frozen truth

Not one of the loggers or heavy equipment operators at the Togo Fire Salvage Sale complained about the 30 mile per hour winds that drove the daytime temperature to 20 degrees below zero on February 5, 2004. The cold didn't dampen their spirits a bit ... they were happy to be working and getting the job done.



Even though winter logging has some advantages -- including no risk of heat exhaustion, no dusty road conditions, good visibility and ease of maneuvering through the

vacant understories -- the cold weather causes other types of problems.



Choker setters often have to 'swim' through the chest-deep snow to reach the logs they fasten together -- or choke -- to the skyline. Rubber-tired skidders must be mounted with massive chains to provide traction on top of the icy skid trails.

Fellers carry shovels to dig snow from the bases of trees they can leave a minimum stump height of 12 inches. Yarders, processors and forwarders require a half-hour to warm up before they will operate. Frozen trees are difficult to cut and hard on chainsaw blades. The teeth on grapple shears are frequently broken on boulders hidden by deep snow. Icy logging roads are hazardous.



While ground crews barely notice the frigid cold while hard at work, they quickly put on extra, wind-proof coats and canvas overalls for lunch breaks and huddle in sheltered areas near warming fires until they go back to work.



"For the most part, we like working in the winter," said Dave Bennett, skyline operator for Swaggart Logging of John Day, Ore. "We like working in the woods at all times of the year," he said.

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