



HOPE FIRE

Fuel Break Utilization

Fire Year 2023



THE HOPE FIRE

The Hope Fire started on July 27, 2023 approximately 2 miles north of State Highway 180 adjacent to Hopewell Road in southeast Fresno County. The fire spread quickly in the steep, dry, and heavily vegetated terrain. CAL FIRE's Air Attack and ground assets were quickly mobilized. Aggressive fire suppression efforts and the history of ongoing fuel treatments dating back to 2019 led to the 3.7 acre fire being fully contained on July 27, 2023.



Figure 1. View of where the fire was stopped by the fuel break. Fuel break extended 200' on both sides of road. The white spots are brush piles burned Spring 2023.



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE **WHITE DEER VEGETATION** MANAGEMENT PROJECT

Work on projects in this area date back to the 2019/2020 reporting period with 272 total acres being treated. That being said, the latest two treatments between August of 2022 and June of 2023 proved decisive in containing the Hope Fire. The treatment consisted of lop and scatter, limbing and bucking, thinning, manual piling, mechanical piling, chipping, and pile burning to create a 200-foot fuel break along the unpaved road pictured above.

Battalion Chief, Alejandro Sanchez, was the Air Tactical Group Supervisor over the fire and observed the positive impact the fuels reduction treatment had on the Hope Incident. "I would like to share how successful one of our FKU (Fresno Kings Unit) fuel breaks was in assisting and preventing a major incident. The rear of the fire was down slope at the base of the hill. Left flank was open for fire progression but was mitigated by the ground forces and assisted by the fuel break. The head of the fire had no movement up the hill due to the fuel break as it prevented any further fire progression, structure threat or the need for air tanker retardant drops. The right flank was stopped on Hopewell Road. The fuel break had a tremendous positive effect in minimizing fire spread and allowing our ground personnel and equipment access to fight the fire."



LESSONS LEARNED

The Hope Fire and the success of the White Deer Vegetation Management Project is a good example of the effectiveness of fuel breaks in wildland fire suppression. Not only did the 200 foot-wide fuel break act to stem the spread of both radiant heat and embers from the fire, it also provided crucial access in steep terrain to firefighting personnel and equipment.

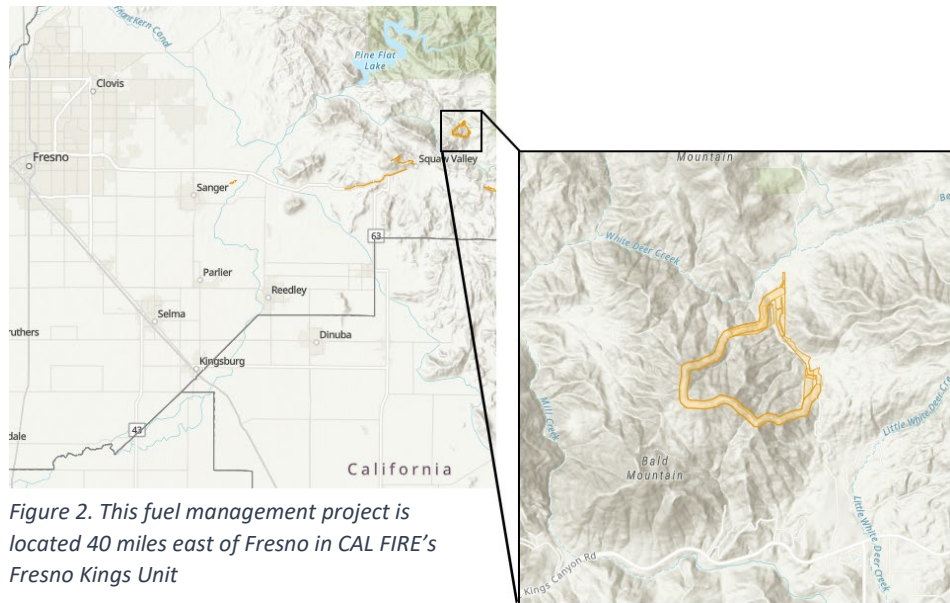


Figure 2. This fuel management project is located 40 miles east of Fresno in CAL FIRE's Fresno Kings Unit



Figure 3. As this post-fire image demonstrates, the steep terrain around the fire would have made firefighting efforts more difficult while also accelerating the spread of the fire uphill.

Prior to the treatment, fuel loads in the area were as high as 20 feet. This type of dense and dry fuel would have quickly ignited in the event of a wildfire. Strategically placed projects such as the White Deer VMP will continue to form a crucial part of fire prevention and fuels reduction efforts in California.