



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# Protecting Land and Way of Life

## MIDDLE KLAMATH RIVER COMMUNITIES PROJECT



Klamath River

Fire is an ever-present part of life in the Middle Klamath River area of extreme Northern California. Natural fire burns among the mountainous forests and steep river ravines of the Klamath National Forest and other public and private lands, creating forests with mixed-age trees and clearings where wildlife forage and a diverse array of plants thrive. Yet, over the last century, fire has been suppressed to protect communities, private property and infrastructure, leaving an abundance of dead plant material and overly dense forests. These conditions mean that when a fire inevitably occurs, there is more material to burn. Fires burn hotter, longer and are more likely to sweep across the crowns of the trees, resulting in greater losses, higher costs and unsafe conditions for residents and firefighters. A wildfire leaves large areas of dead and dying trees in its wake, compromising air quality, soil and waterway health and wildlife habitat.

Through collaboration, honest dialogue and a collective commitment to this rugged landscape, this Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership (JCLRP) project brought together partners to work across boundaries to reduce the threat of wildfire to communities and establish more fire-resilient landscapes.

### PROJECT IMPACT

# 100 JOBS

Total awarded through the JCLRP from 2014-2016: \$6.2 million

This project created about 100 jobs. Crews cut and removed overgrown and dead vegetation, and completed other natural resource management tasks.

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.



### Middle Klamath River Communities Project

## GOALS



Salmon in the Klamath River



**Protect aquatic habitat:** In the steep canyons of the Klamath Mountains, vegetation plays a crucial role in stabilizing soil and preventing erosion. After the severe fire damages, large areas of vegetation and rains can wash exposed soil into streams, muddying their normally clean waters. Habitat for iconic species, such as salmon is protected when fire severity can be lowered.



**Reduce wildfire strength:** More than 10,000 acres of public and private land have been treated or are under contract for treatment as part of the Joint Chiefs' project. Practices like thinning understory plants, constructing fire breaks and controlled burning were designed to reduce the intensity and severity of future wildfires. In 2017, practices put in place through the Joint Chief's project were critical to stopping a wildfire that threatened a local community.



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Klamath National Forest crews use prescribed burning to remove undergrowth and dead vegetation.

In the extremely remote areas around the Klamath River, a trip to a shopping mall or grocery store is an all-day venture, and the cycles of smoke and evacuation from wildfires are part of everyday life. Yet, the area's incredible natural beauty and isolation outweigh the inconveniences and risks to the people who live there.

"These communities have been here for a long time, and they live off the land," said Kevin Osborne, a fire ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service. "Just because a community is small doesn't mean it shouldn't be protected."

According to Osborne, "high-severity fires are very damaging to watersheds because vegetation that controls erosion is removed, and salmon and other species can't survive when there's too much silt in the water." Controlling wildfires is important to maintaining the safety and lifestyles of residents and the lands and waters valued by outdoor enthusiasts who hunt, hike and camp in the mountain forests and valleys and fish in the clear, healthy streams. "We did extensive planning, and the local Natural Resources Conservation Service teams had good relationships with landowners and managers, so when the Joint Chiefs' funding became available, we were ready to go," said Osborne.

Crews cut, piled and burned vegetation that fuels fires. In addition to this physical work, outreach to landowners and education about fire safety increased the return on investment. "This river system is integral to life here—from recreation and the tourism income it generates to the natural resource-based lifestyles it supports and to its cultural significance," Osborne said. "This project has helped reduce risks to the residents of the Middle Klamath and made local forests more resilient."



Photo by Kevin Osborne

### Key Partners

Happy Camp Fire Safe Council Mid  
Klamath Watershed Council  
Northern California Resource  
Council  
Salmon River Restoration Council  
The Nature Conservancy



The Nature Conservancy supports the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership through technical expertise and coordination in support of our mission to protect the lands and waters on which all life depends.

For more information, please visit  
[nrcs.usda.gov/JointChiefsReports](https://nrcs.usda.gov/JointChiefsReports)