

SAVE THE TREES!

Local agencies, non-profits, for profits team up to restore pine population at June Mountain

By Giles

On September 22, The Inyo National Forest, in partnership with California Trout and Mammoth Mountain Ski Area, received a National Fish and Wildlife grant amounting to \$490,144. The funds were awarded to California Trout to oversee the June Mountain Ski Area Whitebark Pine Restoration project.

According to a press release from The USFS, MMSA will carry out the contract to remove “dead and dying coniferous trees on 110 acres of selected whitebark pine stands to promote seed cache behavior by Clark’s Nutcracker...” The intent is to remove bark beetle-impacted trees to improve forest health and decrease the risk of a high intensity, high heat, large scale wildland fire in such close proximity to June Lake. The stand of dead trees is upstream from the Grant Lake and Rush Creek Watersheds, and a large scale forest fire would flush sediment into the historic spawning waters of the wild Brown Trout that live there.

Anyone who has hiked or biked the Yost Lake Trail in the last year can attest to the eerie experience of hiking through several miles of dead, dry forest on June Mountain, operated on USFS Land under a special use permit.

California Trout will work with USFS to monitor the plots where tree removal occurs before and after the project is implemented. California Trout’s Eastern Sierra Manager Dr. Mark Drew made it clear that the project did not involve clear-cutting large swaths of

orest.

Eric Vane, Vegetation Planning Manager for the Inyo National Forest said new ski trails aren’t part of the deal for MMSA. “No additional ski runs are part of this contract. This is strictly a vegetation project, the grants are for fuels reduction and forest management... that would be an inappropriate use of these funds,” said Vane in an interview.

Lauren Burke, Public Relations Manager for MMSA said in an email that “This is not an opportunity to create new trails at June Mountain... I cannot confirm anything else below [whether or not mountain plans to contribute funds to project].”

Drew said he believes it is unlikely that MMSA will finance the project, except for contributing staff hours to implementation and planning.

California Trout will be responsible for public outreach and will collaborate with Forest Service Ecologists to collect pre-treatment data on the site this winter. The contract for wood removal will go to bid in the upcoming months. Wood removal will start in early July 2017.

Deb Schweizer, Public Information Officer for the Inyo National Forest told The Sheet that the site will undoubtedly look different once the project is underway. “There are a lot of dead trees out there. In five years, it will still be a more open area than it was.” Schweizer added that the forest was historically more open than it is now, and that the increased sunlight



Dead stands of White Bark Pine as viewed from June Mountain Ski Area.

should allow the surviving pines to thrive.

Drew added that the current funding covers tree removal for a fifth of the 518 acres identified for fuel management. “California Trout is pursuing a grant from The Sierra Nevada Conservancy for an additional \$500,000. The full project is expected to take 3 to 5 years.”

When asked how the agencies planned to prevent the beetles from damaging the living trees, Drew said it’s tough. “These trees are stressed due to drought. The best we can do is try to improve the health of the living trees and to remove dead ones to eliminate dead wood for the beetles.” Drew said the tree removal will improve forest resilience.

One of June Lake’s public water intake sources is onsite, and another is downstream, between the dead trees and Grant Lake Reservoir, a major source of water for Los Angeles.

“Public water supplies are at stake, as are fisheries, which affect tourism and people’s livelihoods,” said Drew.

Jil Stark, a 41 year resident of June Lake and member of the June Lake CAC, told The Sheet she supports the project. “I think it’s fabulous, and am excited for the education opportunities CalTrout will be providing,” Stark told The Sheet. “Our winter economy is dependent upon the mountain. In the summer and fall, it’s fishing. I think it’s a terrific win-win for everybody.”

Schweizer said that the agencies are still brainstorming uses for the fuel once it’s removed. “Some will go to local wood use, commercial firewood, and biofuel. We are brainstorming productive and low-carbon emission ways to get rid of it, but it’s too early to say.”

Schweizer said, “It’s a big problem, but this is a case where local agencies and people came to the table and teamed up to make a difference in our forest.”

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WEEK 4

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I know what it takes to run a successful business in Mono County. I understand the myriad challenges that businesses in our county face and I have experience in managing those demands. I have been working with the Mono County Economic Development department, am a long time member of the Bridgeport Chamber of Commerce, and have attended North Mono County and Mammoth Lakes Chamber functions.

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**Each week will feature a new reason to vote John Peters for Supervisor. Visit the website for more info!*

Upcoming Events

Oct. 18 @ 5PM: Town Hall Meet & Greet
Bridgeport Memorial Hall

Oct. 27 @ 5PM: Meet & Greet • Walker
Mountain View BBQ

Please feel free to contact me at any time.

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