



Kern River Ranger District

PIUTE FIRE

And

Fire Impacts on Kelso Timber Sale Thinning Units

In 1999 the Kern River Ranger District implemented the Revised Kelso Timber Sale under the California Spotted Owl Sierran Province Interim Guidelines.

The Kelso Timber Sale involved the thinning of 303 acres of dense Jeffrey pine and mixed conifer timber stands. Trees were thinned to an average spacing of 26 feet, leaving the largest and healthiest trees. Logging started in January of 1999, and was completed by June of that year. Trees were whole tree yarded, meaning that the entire tree was skidded into landings, where remaining slash piles, after removing the saw log portion, were burned. The thinned units were then underburned in the fall of 1999, when conditions were favorable. This project proved to be successful during the initial implementation and in promoting conditions suitable for survival during the Piute fire.

The planned effects of the treatments were to: improve tree growth, reduce risk of bark beetle mortality (drop Stand Density Index below 300), retain a minimum of 40% canopy cover and to reduce prescribed fire induced tree mortality.

The human caused Piute Fire started on June 28, 2008, south of Piute Peak, and quickly spread, primarily to the northeast. The fire was contained on July 24, 2008, encompassing a total of 37,026 acres. Three of the thinning units on the Kelso Sale were in the vicinity of Alaska Flat. The fire burned at high intensity in the area immediately surrounding the thinned Kelso units, killing most of the trees. While the fire continued to burn through the thinned units, it laid down substantially, and was primarily a surface fire, with nearly all of the large over story trees surviving. One small area near the thinning units did burn with moderately high intensity where it was adjacent to a narrow unthinned strip along a riparian area. But it soon laid back down to a ground fire within the thinning unit. Another Kelso thinning unit was located in the Landers Meadow area. While the fire did not burn through this thinned unit, it did provide a relatively safe area for fire crews to conduct a burnout operation just north of the thinned unit, and stop the fire spread short of several structures in the Landers area.



Treated Area: The uncontrolled Piute fire (above) burning through the Kelso unit. The fire burned with low intensity as the area in this picture was previously thinned and prescribed burned.



Aerial view: View looking northeast showing the Kelso unit with Alaska Flat in the upper left portion of the photograph. Note the high intensity Piute fire burned up to and around the treated Kelso units.



Untreated Area: This is a riparian zone left untreated in the Kelso fuels reduction and forest health project. This area burned intensely in the Piute fire.



Treated Area: Kelso thinning and prescribed burn unit after the Piute fire burned through the area. The fire scorched just the lower limbs and consumed the ground fuels.