

How the Mendocino NF Baseball Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction project will ensure that Nature's Benefits such as clean water, recreation, and more are available now and for generations to come

The Baseball Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction project otherwise known as "Baseball" is a partnership with the Mendocino County Blacktail Association (MCBA) and the Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) located on a 600-acre site east of Covelo, California on the Mendocino National Forest. The project also happens to be in the headwaters of the Black Butte Wild and Scenic River, and adjacent to Atchison Campground. Unique characteristics of the geographic area include historic and cultural resources, geologic resources, and Congressionally-designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. The Black Butte River is important habitat for salmon; a staple in the diet of the area's Native American population. The landscape hosts deer populations that include numerous large bucks, with the Covelo District earning the name "The Big Buck Capital". In addition, Mendocino County is the number-one county for Boone & Crockett Club entries into the record books for blacktail deer.

What's at Risk?:

Oak woodlands were being encroached upon by conifers leading to crowded conditions which resulted in hardwood tree becoming more susceptible to insects, disease and severe wildfire occurrence. With Covelo only 14 miles away, Covelo and the Round Valley Indian Reservation communities are threatened by the risk of severe wildfire. Also threatened are large portions of key winter and summer deer habitat, where oaks play an important part in deer grazing by providing acorns in late summer, fall and early winter. Browsing or feeding on oak leaves and twigs is also very important for deer in early spring when the new growth emerges. Large scale, high-severity, fires can reduce the amount and quality of deer cover and forage habitat for several years. Post-fire erosion could also have significant downstream effects on water quality and fish habitat in the Black Butte and Middle Fork Eel Rivers.

Restoration Plan:

The Mendocino National Forest is reducing hazardous fuels such as trees, grass, and shrublands, and is enhancing wildlife habitat in this area as funds become available, and well as seeking outside funding through partnerships. At least 300 acres have been thinned, with 170 of these having been funded through the partnership with MCBA and MDF. An additional 80 acres is under contract now, funded in part by the Glenn County RAC. The next step on these acres will be a prescribed burn when the conditions are appropriate.

Partners and Funding:

The Baseball project has received funding from several partners: Ninety-five thousand dollars was received in grant funds which was divided between the Mendocino County Blacktail Association (\$85,000) and the Mule Deer Foundation (\$10,000). The Glenn County RAC funded an additional \$35,000 in FY18 which is currently being implemented. Post-thinning prescribed burns are being planned and can be an avenue to increase local understanding of prescribed fire through on-going engagement efforts with the Covelo community via the FIRESCAPE Mendocino collaborative.

Nature's Benefits that will be positively impacted from the restoration activities

Local Economy:

Reducing the threat of severe wildfire to this critical corridor will ensure that population centers, jobs and recreation will be protected. Local communities, such as Covelo to the east and Upper Lake to the south, rely on the economic boost from visitors buying supplies and staying in towns close to the forest during their trips. For public deer hunting, which makes up the majority of the recreational use of the Covelo Ranger District, the estimated annual expense each season per hunter is estimated by the

Mendocino Blacktail Deer Association to be approximately \$650. California Department of Fish and Wildlife harvest reports show 631 deer were harvested in 2017 in three zones within the deer areas of the project. This is a total of \$410,150 per season for public hunting in and around the Covelo area. Much of this money is spent in local communities and communities along the way to the Covelo Ranger District. In addition to this, private hunts are run on several nearby properties by the Golden Ram Sportsman Club which also hosts hunters from the Fregoso Foundation, a non-profit 501 (C) 3 organization that focuses on thanking our Armed Forces and their families, especially the combat wounded, for their service and sacrifice. One of the Foundation goals is to provide first-class outdoor sporting and recreation activities to the combat wounded. One of the private-land hunting areas the Foundation uses is immediately adjacent to the Baseball project area.

Water:

Reducing the severity of wildland fire will reduce the likelihood of sedimentation and other pollutants entering the water supply; thereby protecting water quality and fishery resources in the Black Butte Wild and Scenic River. Changes to water flow are not expected as a result of the projects, but could be realized by large scale wildfire, potentially resulting in flooding.

Carbon Sequestration:

Clearing dense vegetation will offer more water to remaining tree stands; making them healthier and more resistant to bark beetle penetration and better able to sequester carbon.

Recreation:

Maintaining and improving wildlife habitat enhances hunting and recreation opportunities in the area. Annually, 3,275 visitors come to the Mendocino to hunt, and 13,000 to fish, as their primary activity with the biggest recreational activity taking place on the Baseball project area being deer hunting. This project will enhance deer habitat quality as well as protect the hunting grounds and the Atchison Campground, which is highly utilized during deer hunting, from severe wildfire threat. It also provides protection to private inholding lands that are utilized by the Golden Ram Sportsman's Club (a hunting club).

Nature's Benefits and Future Generations:

The daily benefits from the Mendocino NF Baseball Wildlife Habitat Improvement and Fuels Reduction project on the Mendocino National Forest will positively impact local populations to include tribes as well as plant and animal habitat. Water, carbon, recreation, local economies, are all Nature's Benefits that can be self-sustaining as a result of a more resilient landscape that allows for low to moderate fire, rather than high-intensity wildfire. In addition, projects that enhance water quality, and increase recreation in small communities can provide for economic stability, health and safety, and build trust within communities and between government agencies. Effective communication of the Nature's Benefits the public receives from these efforts, can increase community interest and awareness, fostering partnerships and the sharing of resources. Only through such cooperation and shared ownership can we ensure future generations have the opportunity to enjoy Nature's Benefits as well.



After thinning



Former Mendocino Forest Supervisor and District Ranger Frank Aebly with veterans, standing together in a forested area, hosted by the Fregoso Foundation at the Golden Ram facility in Covelo.