



FOREST MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR BIG BASIN REDWOODS, AÑO NUEVO AND BUTANO STATE PARKS

Project Overview

The August 2020 CZU Lightning Complex Fire burned over 86,000 acres of forest in the Santa Cruz Mountains, including most of Big Basin, Año Nuevo and Butano State Parks. In many areas the fire was more severe than fires in recent history due to fuel accumulation from decades of fire suppression, climate related effects such as drought and extreme fire weather, and a departure from native people's historic management of the land. While most individual redwood trees survived the fire, the landscape and forest characteristics have been severely altered by these effects which has created an ecological reset for the forests in the burn area. State Parks considers this an opportunity for a stewardship course change to begin returning the forest to a pre-European condition that is more resilient to wildfire.

State Parks, with partners, is developing a landscape-scale Forest Management Strategy for these three park units to guide a sustainable forest recovery effort including identifying forest restoration projects that can increase long term forest resiliency to future events like the CZU Fire. The strategy will allow State Parks to prioritize restoration and management decisions to maximize the ecological benefit and opportunity to increase resiliency. State Parks has historically used prescribed fire in the Santa Cruz District and expects to continue to use and expand the use of prescribed fire. The project will evaluate the needs and methods for reducing the density of ladder fuels, dead and dying trees, and in some cases tree density in areas that were historically clearcut, to advance restoration objectives identified in the Forest Management Strategy in the future.

Goals & Objectives

The overall goal of the Forest Management Strategy is to improve the conditions of forestlands by conducting ecologically restorative treatments that increase resilience, biological diversity, and reduce the severity of future wildfire.

Project Goals:

- Manage vegetation so that it supports a richness of native species.
- Maintain or enhance habitat for extant populations of California Native Plant Society, state or federally-listed species.
- Maintain flooding, tidal flows, and other disturbance regimes, including fire, that support sustainable populations of most of the species present.
- Detect new infestations of exotic species while still small and eliminate them where feasible.

Redwood Forest Goals:

- Maintain the current extent and complexity of old growth redwood forest.
- Reduce fuel load and vertical continuity of fuels to minimize the probability of stand replacing wildfire.
- To the extent possible, approximate the prehistoric burn regime of this forest type.
- Maintain the existing suite of herbaceous understory species.

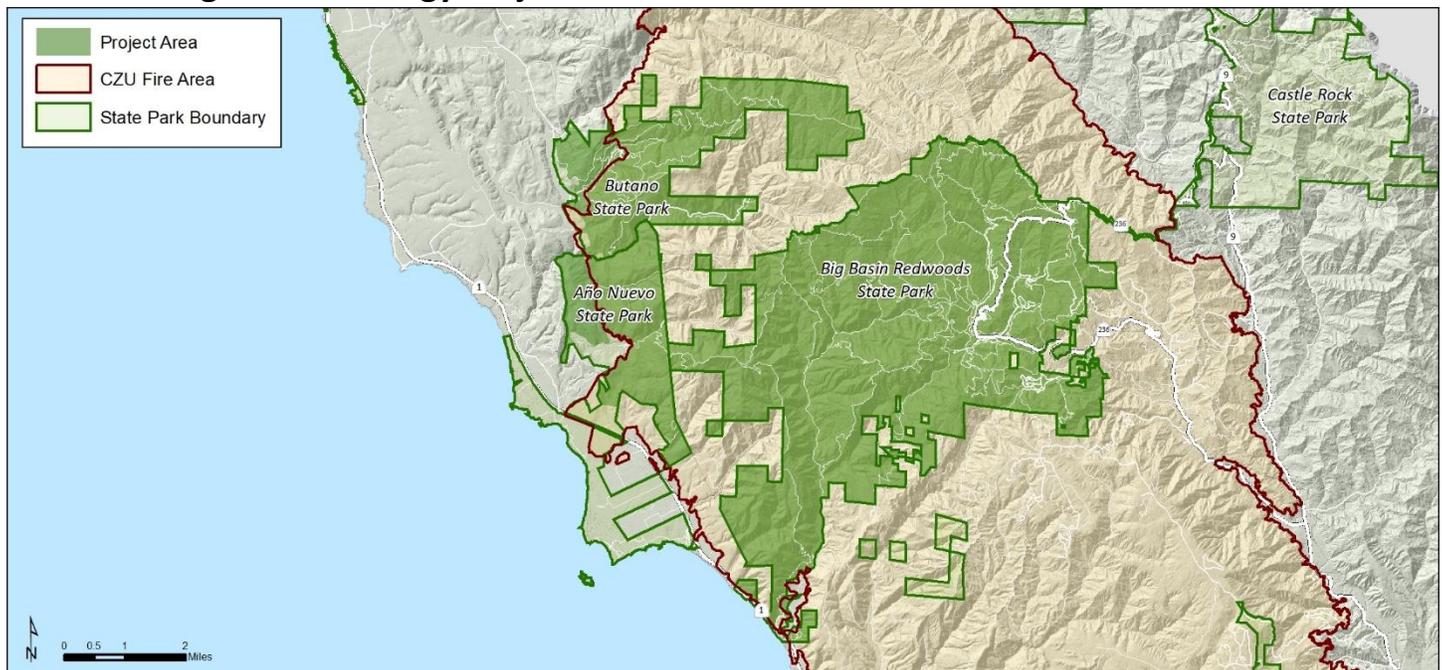


Project Approach and Timeline

The project team will complete field work and data gathering, synthesize data, prepare a forest planning strategy to prepare for the permitting process including the following project phases:

- **Project Scoping and Analysis** (2021): The team will compile existing GIS data and remote sensing data related to burn severity, vegetation typing, forest canopy, infrastructure, watercourses, larger sub-watersheds, priority project areas, sensitive species, and topography.
- **Field Investigations** (2021-2022): The project will include extensive field site visits to research, verify and compile forest characteristics such as forest stand structure, growth, understory species, burn severity, habitat condition for key species throughout the project area.
- **General Assessment** (2022 – 2023): The team will prepare a summary of key resource findings from data gathered during field investigations, potential types of treatments and project areas, permitting recommendations, and possible data gaps and research opportunities.
- **Forest Management Strategy** (2023): The team will prepare a forest management document including background, goals, management strategy vision and concepts, and descriptions of desired future conditions and treatment plans.
- **Permitting** (2023 – 2024): Based on the outcomes of the Forest Management Strategy, State Parks will complete regulatory requirements and required environmental reviews pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act.
- **Implementation**: As soon as possible, State Parks and partners will conduct forest restoration projects in a prioritized manner within the three park areas.

Forest Management Strategy Project Area



California State Parks is working in partnership with Save the Redwoods League and Parks California to contract ARC to complete this project.