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## Saddlehorn HOA Hazardous Fuels Evaluation Fall 2024

On October 1, 2024, High Sierra Forestry (HSF) completed an evaluation of the common area within the Saddlehorn HOA. The past two wet winters have resulted in tremendous vegetation growth in both the grasses and native brush. This growth has created a continuous fuel environment that will spread fire quickly and at high intensities. Most of the common areas within Saddlehorn were mowed during the spring/ summer of 2021. Young healthy brush species are now occupying the interspaces created by past fuel treatments, creating the potential for catastrophic fire growth.

The entire fuels reduction community got an education from the Davis Fire. There were fuels breaks within St. James Village that were very similar to those throughout Saddlehorn. In the event of a wind driven fire, greater spacing between brush is needed. During the Davis Fire, fire behavior was reduced when the fire ran into fuels treatments, but not to the extent expected. The goal of fuels treatments is not to stop fire, but to reduce the intensity and spread rate, making it easier for firefighters to extinguish.

At this point we need to transition from the older large bitterbrush that was left by past treatments to smaller, younger and smaller bushes. This will reduce the overall fuel loading, reduce the overall height of the leave vegetation, and in turn reduce the rate of fire spread and fire intensity. The large bitterbrush will need to be masticated and possibly cut by hand in sensitive areas. The size of the vegetation to be removed is too large for a mower.

The areas of highest hazard are located along the boundaries of Saddlehorn (trying to keep any fire out of the community), along roadways, the first 10 to 30 feet adjacent to private property and along the paved pathways throughout the common area. I would recommend treating these areas first and creating 15 feet to 20 feet of spacing. Currently spacing is less than 10 feet with thick grasses in the interspaces. Throughout the evaluation I noticed bitterbrush 6 to 8 feet tall. Once fire is established within this vegetation it will produce flame lengths 15 to 30 feet tall.

It is my recommendation the common areas in Saddlehorn be masticated to lower the fuel levels and transition the leave bushes from older/ larger vegetation to younger/ smaller vegetation. The mastication will also grind down the tall grasses further reducing the overall height of vegetation. I would also recommend a fall herbicide treatment to decrease the amount of regrowth, thus extending the interval between fuels treatments. Herbicide applications can be 25% of the cost of fuels treatments. Current rates of mastication are approximately \$1,300 per acre.

Below is a brief look at the treatments of the past and a possible budget for the recommended treatments. I think it is safe to predict approximately 90 acres of mastication for 2025. It is not always feasible to complete all the acres at one time based on available funding. I can create a priority areas list based on funding allocated to the project.

	Acres of Mastication	Acres of Mowing	Cost
2013	96		\$ 70,238
2018		66	\$ 23,100
2021	6	71	\$ 30,850
2025*	90		\$ 117,000*

\*estimated acres and cost/ acre. Actual would be based on bids and actual acres treated.

I have included pictures with comments detailing the current fuels conditions in Saddlehorn.



Photo #1 - Continuous fuel bed with very little open space between brushes.



Photo #2 – Foreground shows small sage brush and grasses, giving way to taller bitterbrush



Photo #3 - Continuous fuel bed with very little open space between brushes.



Photo #4 – Bitterbrush on the right side is what should be targeted for removal.



Photo #5 – This bitterbrush is 6 to 7 feet tall with lots of dead branches mixed in. There is no space between bushes creating a continuous fuel bed.



Photo #6 – Tall brush adjacent to planted trees. I recommend creating a “halo” around the trees drip line and then remove the lower branches of the trees (latter fuels).



Photo #7 – Dead brush in the foreground with minimal spacing between existing brush.



Photo #8 – Large brush adjacent to trees with branches all the way to the ground.



Photo #9 – Its hard to see in this picture, but there is lots of dead brush that should be removed



Photo #10 – Very tall brush along the walking path with little to no spacing. Also brush directly under the Pine tree.



Photo #11 – Dead bitterbrush.



Photo #12 – Tall brush along a fence line that could bring fire into the adjacent property.



Photo #13 – There is good spacing here, but I recommend removing the older/ larger bitterbrush (red circle) and keeping the younger/ healthier bush (black circle).



Photo #14 – East side of Thomas Creek Road; little to no spacing, brush adjacent to and under trees and high ignition hazard from the road.



Photo #15 – East side of Thomas Creek Road; little to no spacing, brush adjacent to and under trees and high ignition hazard from the road.



Photo #16 – Very little spacing with a bunch a tall older bitterbrush. Also brush adjacent to trees.