

designation until 2032 to allow the project to further investigate the impacts of feller-bunchers in the WLPZ. Attached below you will find images of the work conducted at Blodgett within Class II WLPZs, including treated and untreated WLPZ areas (Figure 1). Preliminary data from the primary investigator, Dr. Rob York, has not yet detected significant sedimentation in watercourses after feller-buncher use when BMPs are followed. The long-term goal of the study is to inform decision-making related to fuel treatments in WLPZs and the inclusion of an adaptive management framework when considering the use of feller-bunchers in WLPZs. The use of an adaptive management framework would not preclude the use of feller-bunchers in WLPZs while the study is still being conducted; more widespread use would increase opportunities to monitor and better quantify environmental impacts relative to fire hazard reduction benefits.



Figure 1. Treated (Left) vs. untreated (Right) WLPZ at Blodgett Forest Research Station

We hope that upon completion, this project will provide valuable insight and help to further shape regulations regarding heavy equipment in WLPZs. Ultimately, it is the Board’s goal to stay current on effective management strategies, especially those that allow for more efficient harvest with small or negligible impacts. In the face of increasingly devastating wildfires, the Board finds it appropriate to approach the Department with direction to more widely accept the use of feller-bunchers within WLPZs, provided that BMPs are followed. The utilization of feller-bunchers in WLPZs may serve the dual purpose of increasing the pace and scale of fuel reduction while combatting the rising costs associated with timber harvest. The Board looks forward to further reviewing this matter in the near future and hearing comments from review team personnel, RPFs, Licensed Timber Operators, and landowner communities regarding the expedited review and increased use of feller-bunchers for forest management activities in California.

Sincerely,

J. Keith Gillless, Ph.D.

Chairman

Board of Forestry and Fire Protection