

## Challenges and Solutions to the Implementation of MLC Forest Health Project

1. Strong perception from the public and from many NPS employees that cutting a large number of living trees (dripline radius-cut trees were up to 24" dbh) in an extremely high-visible National Park Service campground would conflict with the mission of the NPS. Many people felt that the use of heavy equipment associated with mechanical harvesting methods would be ecologically destructive, harm campground infrastructure, and result in a visually unappealing landscape.

### Solution:

Active education program to inform public and park employees of the huge forest health problem we faced, what the consequences would be if we ignored the problem, and how the completed project would help address the situation. This consisted of:

- developing and presenting project plans to park managers to get management support well in advance of project implementation..
  - actively and consistently involving all park divisions in project planning and implementation.
  - keeping citizens, staff, park visitors well-informed about the project via fieldtrips, written interpretive materials, park newspaper article, entrance station handouts, interpretive talks, project briefings, and regular visitor contacts by campground hosts and park rangers.
  - Explaining the rationale of mechanical harvesting methods and how using credits from the harvest of merchantable materials to offset the service contract costs and the use of local byproducts to help take care of local energy needs made sense environmentally and economically. Also that a sizeable portion of the budget would be used for site rehab to mitigate visual impacts from mechanical thinning.
  - Conducting a smaller pilot thinning project in a less visible campground in 2006 which was viewed as very successful by the majority of the park staff and as far as we know the public.
2. Contractor lagged seriously behind schedule during parts of the project. This caused much anxiety for me as project manager because of the project's location within an extremely high visitor-use area and the fact that I had to regularly ask for flexibility and concessions from affected park employees and program managers to accommodate his behind-schedule operations. Several no-cost time extensions were made, but in the end we issued a "cure notice" to the contractor advising that the Government would likely terminate the contract unless pace picked up significantly. Fortunately, this course of action worked and the contractor increased productivity to an acceptable level.
  3. We were forced to rush contract awarding and project implementation due to an unexpected conflict with a high priority maintenance project. This meant that much of the prep work scheduled for summer had to be rescheduled for the winter/spring with very little lead time. Work such as developing contract scopes of work, conducting pre-bid site visits, establishing long-term monitoring plots and photo-points, conducting pre-treatment monitoring, silvicultural layout/tree marking, developing interpretive materials, and a myriad of other details all had to be done on a much shorter timeline. Further

complicating matters was the fact that whereas original plans called for the project to be done in the fall after campgrounds were closed and visitation low, the new summer schedule meant that campground loops and sometimes the entire campground had to be temporarily closed during the busy visitor season and that reservations in some cases had to be cancelled. Because the project was in close proximity to vacationing park visitors, dust, noise, and visitor access had to be controlled. Many people over all park divisions were involved in helping me to manage for all these situations and at the end of the visitor season all these efforts paid off because there were very few visitor complaints and the overwhelming majority of park staff, park visitors, and the public remained advocates for this and future similar projects in the park.