

Overhaul of Big Meadow watershed about to begin



Big Meadow will be restored starting this fall.

Photo/Todd Chaponot-USFS

By Kathryn Reed

It is difficult to pinpoint what are supposed to be four distinct areas within the 640-acre Big Meadow Creek Watershed.

“The big thing is some conifer encroachment is going into these unique areas. Some are no longer meadows because conifers are in their place,” explained Raul Sanchez, U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist.

Meadow, aspen stands, adjacent forest and riparian corridors dominate this area of the basin. Cattle grazing, fire suppression and timber harvest through the decades have made this setting less natural and more forested.

For decades, fire has been lacking off Luther Pass. That’s all about to change. Beginning this fall fire will be reintroduced by the USFS. Restoration work will also create better habitat

for and diversity of wildlife.

The initial phase will be to thin some of the forest and then begin burning.

“The reason we need to do the pretreatment thinning and burning is we will reduce the amount of conifer encroachment,” said Sanchez, project point man.

Pile burns will take place when weather conditions permit. After that a broadcast burn will begin.

“(This) means we put fire to the ground in a controlled manner and allow the fire to burn on its own,” Sanchez said.

Because this is such a remote area without roads, hand tools will be used for thinning. It is on the left side of Highway 89 going toward Hope Valley from South Tahoe. From the Big Meadow trailhead walk in a ways; the meadow complex is part of the project, as are the two drainages that go farther up the watershed.

The proposed plan of action is at www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/projects; scroll down to Big Meadow.