

Skinner Butte Habitat Enhancement Project 2020

Skinner Butte Park is a beloved Eugene landmark and one of our most visited parks. This project will help preserve and protect the Butte by removing non-native shrubs and small trees which have invaded a significant portion of the natural area in the park, greatly changing its character and increasing the risk of a damaging fire.

Project Goals

- Reduce wildfire risk
- Improve habitat for native plants and animals
- Expand public access



Desired Outcome

When the work is complete, the south-facing side of the Butte, below Skinner Butte Loop Road will consist of more open, mixed species woodland with scattered clumps of shrubs to help preserve wildlife habitat. In the coming years, a planned trail will bring park visitors through this restored area.

Background

Much has changed on and around Skinner Butte from the time Eugene Skinner settled here. Prior to that time, the southern, eastern, and western flanks of the Butte were open prairies and oak savanna, a landscape maintained in part by fires set by Kalapuya tribal members who lived in this area of the valley. Since then, without regular disturbance, a large number of various types of trees have come in on their own or been planted, converting this part of the Butte into a more dense woodland. In addition, many invasive shrubs and trees such as blackberry, wild cherry, and English hawthorn have colonized extensive areas on the butte and now dominate the lower growing vegetation.

A potentially hazardous situation has developed because of the dense vegetation with crowded shrubs and young trees growing close to larger trees. The continuous thickets of vegetation have formed what are called “ladder fuels” - vegetation which can carry fire from the ground up into trees, increasing the probability of a damaging crown, or canopy, fire. A canopy fire could jeopardize the safety of park visitors and the homes and businesses neighboring Skinner Butte. Several small fires have already occurred over the last few years, most recently last summer.

What We’re Doing

Many of the City’s natural area parks have unnaturally dense amounts of vegetation, either due to how the land was used before it became a park or due to invasion by trees and shrubs. The Parks and Open Space Division, the Eugene-Springfield Fire Department, and the Emergency Management Program have been working together since 2011 to identify solutions for reducing heavy fuel loads throughout the park system while also improving conditions for park visitors and native plants and wildlife.

In February 2015 the local district of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) received Community Assistance funding to aid the City of Eugene in reducing catastrophic wildfire risk through work on City-owned lands. To date, the “Fuels Reduction” project has worked to reduce fuel loads in various Ridgeline park sites, including Suzanne Arlie Park, Wild Iris Ridge, and South Eugene Meadows. Starting

in 2017 Skinner Butte has become a priority urban site for safety improvements, given its proximity to houses and businesses, dense brush and trees, and recent history of fire. In the early fall of 2017 and 2018, hand crews removed hundreds of cubic yards of fuel (largely non-native shrubs and small trees) on seven and a half acres on the south, west, and east slopes of the butte. A third round of habitat fuels reduction work will take place in the winter of 2020 on the lower portion of the south slope, primarily in the cedar forest.

Plan for Skinner Butte in 2020

- Work is expected to last 1-2 weeks and will consist primarily of the removal of small diameter cedar trees and invasive, non-native small trees and shrubs, including hawthorn, and cherry on the lower slopes of the south forest.
- We may also remove young, small trees growing into the canopy of larger trees. This is designed to protect the older large trees, and may include oaks, maples, and other native species.
- Work will be conducted by hand using contractor crews, skilled foresters, and power tools.
- Cut vegetation will be chipped and removed necessitating temporary road and trail closures. Road access to the summit will always be available. Trails on the north and west slopes will be open.
- There will be no access to work areas during the project, to protect the safety of park users. We will post signs and check for members of the public in the vicinity before work begins.
- Follow-up weed control work will also take place in late-summer and early fall which will include herbicide treatment of resprouting invasive shrubs and blackberry, as well as poison oak adjacent to trails.

Expectations

- There will be noise during the project.
- There will be limited access to parts of the Butte during project activities.
- After work is complete, the site will appear disturbed. We anticipate a recovery period of 1-3 years.

Helpful Links and Contact Information

Skinner Butte Project Page: eugene-or.gov/skinnerbutteproject

City of Eugene – Team Up for Fire Safety: www.eugene-or.gov/teamup4firesafety

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June 2017 pre-project photo



June 2019 post-project photo



1915: Looking southwest from top of Skinner Butte. (Lane Co. Historical Museum)



1908: Looking southeast from west side of Skinner Butte. (Lane Co. Historical Museum)



Legend

- Site Boundary
- 2020 Work Area
- Streets
- Trails
- Shared-Use
- Pedestrian

**Skinner Butte Park
2020 Fuels Reduction - Proposed Treatment Area**



2019 Aerial Photos
12/12/2019

