

2004 Big Cypress National Preserve Gyrotrac Brushcutters Assist in Hazard Fuels Reduction

. . . the National Park Service at Big Cypress National Preserve was able to purchase two Gyrotrac brushcutters. Since arriving in the park during the fall of 2003, the Gyrotracs have added another dimension to an already successful fire management program. In 2004, Big Cypress proposed cutting brush and non-native trees to reduce the fire hazard on 500 acres along Highway 41, Tamiami Trail in Southern Florida. By June 2004, 250 acres had been treated by the machines, providing reduced fuel loadings next to a private business, several structures, two Indian villages, as well as the highway. The scheduling of the work was accelerated through the use of a new planning tool, the Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI) Categorical Exclusion.



By using the HFI Categorical Exclusion, the park was able to start working on the project sooner than it could have if it was required to do an Environmental Assessment. The ability to use the HFI Categorical Exclusion arrived at the park about the same time as the Gyrotracs. The staff at Big Cypress estimates that using the HFI Categorical exclusion saved them two to six months of analysis.

As well as reducing hazardous fuels, the Gyrotracs are also accelerating the re-establishment of the coastal prairie that had been invaded by non-native trees and brush. After the Gyrotracs have completed the work, the areas treated will be prescribed burned to reduce the chance of brush re-sprouting and encourage the re-establishment of native grasses.

The Gyrotracs were deployed on a lightning-caused suppression fire in the park in late June of 2004. According to Big Cypress . . . the Gyrotracs proved to be an excellent suppression tool on the fire. They were sent to open up an access road for fire engines and clear the brush from around power poles. They also cleared brush around a pond to make it safer for helicopters to fill their buckets with water to drop on the fire.



Gyrotracs are being used to clear vegetation at Big Cypress National Preserve