

# Crews slashing away at fire-prone river bottoms

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By Ryan McCarthy/Appeal-Democrat



Chris Negrete of Sacramento clears debris just north of the 10th Street bridge in Yuba City on Monday. The California Conservation Corps is removing vegetation during a 13-week project to reduce the fire hazard in the area.  
David Bitton/Appeal-Democrat

Yuba City firefighters have responded to 28 blazes over the last three years in the river bottoms north of the 10th Street bridge — a situation Tonya Hutchinson, Xavier Cobian and others are confronting with chainsaws, weed whackers and McClouds.

The California Conservation Corps is removing shrubs and debris, along with pruning trees, to take out fuel sources for fires and take on a project planned to cover about 100 acres along the Feather River.

"The hardest part," said Hutchinson, a supervisor, is that "there's just so much."

California Conservation Corps member Cobian, 18, said as he and others worked Monday that heat is part of the project.

"The sun will get to you sometimes," Cobian said.

The McClouds, a tool with a heavy-duty hoe, is among the instruments the two dozen corps members use in the 13-week project.

Crew leader Chris Negrete had the hoe in hand and recalled his other such fire hazard efforts that have included thinning out trees in the Auburn area.

"It's a fairly gratifying feeling," Negrete said of seeing the results of weeks of work.

Supervisor Taufua Niuvao said when the work is finished, the site will look something like a park. A trail is planned to lead from the levee to the river. Crews get a workout as well as an education by learning about plants and other matters outdoors, Niuvao said,

The project near the Feather River is the first for Sacramento resident Ramon Orzoco, 18.

"We watch each others' backs," Orzoco said of the CCC crew. "We have plenty of teamwork."

Brown pants and tan shirt are the standard uniform, although workers can go all white when wearing Tyvek coveralls to protect against poison oak.

Funds allocated to the Conservation Corps through Prop. 84, approved by California voters in 2006, pay for the \$231,980 fuel-reduction project in Yuba City.

Brad McIntire, director of parks and recreation for the city, said of crew members undertaking the effort that, "They are definitely seeing the fruits of their labor."

The Feather River Parkway-Willow Island park is planned for 145 acres in the area and is expected to include a disc golf course funded with a grant from Friends of Yuba City Park and Recreation. The nine-hole course is under design. Groundbreaking for the park is expected in the spring or summer of 2012.

Crew leader Negrete, who has seen the Sacramento River, got his first look at the Feather River working to reduce fire hazards here — and gives high marks to the waterway that runs through this region.

"The Sacramento's kind of dingy," said Negrete, 25, but the Feather "looks crisp and nice."

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