

Forest Restoration Series: Prescribed Fire

Harney County Restoration Collaborative (HCRC) partners have engaged locally with the community and the USFS for the past 8 years. HCRC uses science and monitoring on an ongoing basis to make informed recommendations for restoration projects. This brochure is intended to help us share some of the topics we are discussing and the thought process behind the decisions we are making.

What We Are Talking About: Prescribed Fire

East-side forests historically experienced frequent, low-intensity, surface fires that helped maintain low tree and shrub density and keep the forest healthy. Fire suppression has increased forest fuels and contributed to the potential for large, stand-replacing wildfires that are occurring with more frequency across the west. HCRC partners believe that reintroducing low intensity, surface fire is an important part of forest restoration efforts.

Prescribed Fire versus Wildfire



- Intentionally set by fire managers
- Actively managed for intensity, weather, and amount of area burned
- Limited tree mortality - rarely does mortality of larger trees exceed 10% - 15% of remaining trees after logging
- Smoke impact on communities monitored



- The result of natural causes, human carelessness, or arson
- Depending on weather conditions, might be managed and allowed to burn
- Can have unintended consequences such as causing extensive tree mortality in small to large patches and personal property damage.
- Uncontrolled smoke

Facts on Forest Restoration and Prescribed Fire

Purpose and Goal

Prescribed fire is primarily used to reduce fine fuels such as grasses, sticks, and branches, not trees. HCRC's goals for restoration are resilient forests that are diverse in age, species, and density and that exhibit appropriate species composition and structure for the ecosystem. Prescribed fire helps us achieve this goal.



When it is Used in Restoration

The typical order of the restoration process:

COMMERCIAL
HARVEST OF
LARGE DIAMETER
TIMBER

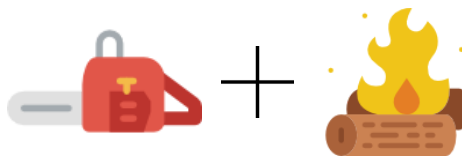
NON-COMMERCIAL
THINNING OF
SMALL-DIAMETER
TREES

PREScribed
FIRE

Historical Fire Activity

Average time between fires on dry-side forests such as the southern Malheur.

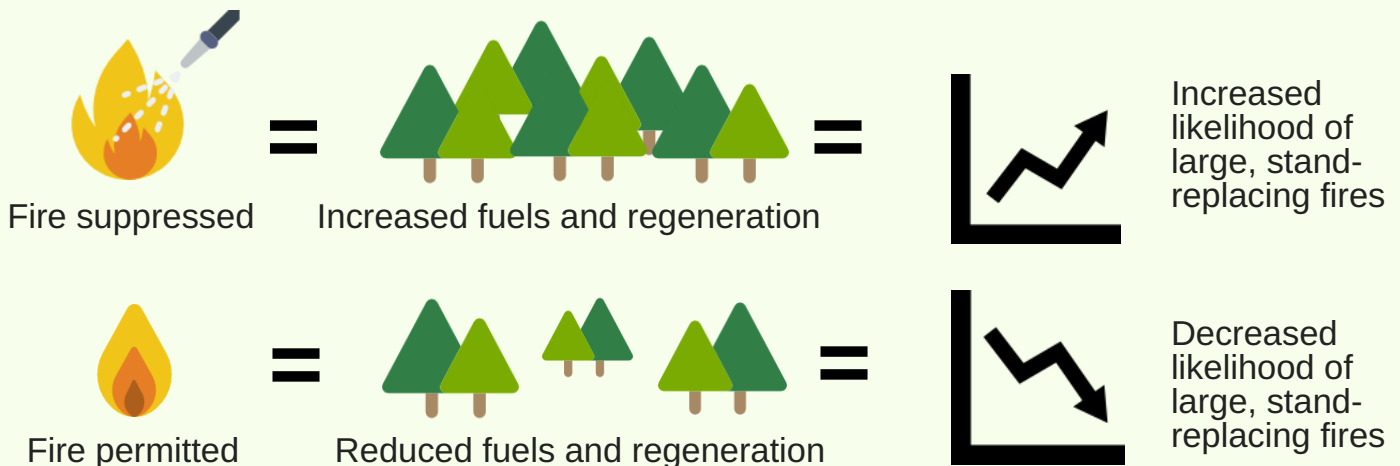
10 to 21 years.



Effective Restoration

Current studies show that the combination of thinning and prescribed fire is the most effective way to create fire tolerant forests. Thinning on its own has little to no effect on subsequent wildfire.

The Consequences of Fire Suppression



Limiting Factors When Using Prescribed Fire

There are many factors inhibiting the use of fire today. Let's look at a few:



Air-quality restrictions. Forest Service personnel must meet state requirements for air quality. Prescribed fire can be prohibited in cases where the wind will blow towards a community, the burn area is large, or the air quality is already poor.



Negative perceptions about prescribed fire. Negative feelings about prescribed fire range from not liking the way the forest looks after to believing that fire wastes forest resources. Public support is needed in order for prescribed fire to be more readily used.



Liability. Prescribed fire isn't an exact science. Weather conditions can change, the fire can burn hotter than expected, and firefighters can't control exactly where the fire burns at all times. Fire managers can lose their jobs if fires grow larger than expected or damage personal property. As a result, fire managers must be very cautious, which diminishes the use of prescribed fire.



Where We Stand and What You Can Do

HCRC partners have determined that prescribed fire is an important part of restoration efforts. We are currently working to find ways to get more prescribed fire on the ground, and you can help. You can write to your local and state representatives, educate your friends and neighbors by passing on this resource and discussing it with them, donate to the High Desert Partnership, or join us!

Become a Partner!

We welcome anyone with an interest in forest restoration, timber harvest, grazing, road access, recreation, etc. to attend meetings. We want to hear everyone's voice. For more information follow the High Desert Partnership on Facebook or visit our webpage highdesertpartnership.org.

HARNEY COUNTY RESTORATION COLLABORATIVE

The Harney County Restoration Collaborative was convened in 2008 to address the critical issues facing the economic, social, and ecological sustainability in Harney County. Partners of the initiative represent a wide range of interests including those of land management agencies, conservation organizations, the timber industry, landowners, ranchers, and interested citizens.

The purpose of restoration on the southern Malheur Forest is to create fire tolerant and ecologically diverse forest ecosystems, increase economic capacity by supporting new and emerging markets, and improve the ability to restore forest on a landscape scale. Partners in the collaboration come to a consensus on decisions using current scientific information and monitoring results.

They have been very successful in coming to a consensus on numerous issues surrounding ecological, economic and social impacts of forest restoration projects. As a result, none of these large projects have been litigated to date.

