Restoring and Maintaining Healthy Forest Ecosystems in the Interior West

What have we learned? The 20th Century has taught us some important lessons about forest ecosystems, and the way they respond to human activities:

- Many of our forest ecosystems are highly dependent on fire for renewal. These ecosystems include the ponderosa pine forests of the Interior West.

- In these ecosystems, successful fire exclusion combined with selective removal of overstory pine has allowed the growth of dense understories and changed the species composition. As a result, these ecosystems are now very vulnerable to drought, wildfire and insects.

- The introduction of non-native invasive organisms has been devastating. For example, 90% of the western white pine has been wiped out of the Northern Rockies due to the introduced disease, white pine blister rust.

- Where ecosystems are not healthy, things that humans value are put at risk: water quality, wildlife habitat, recreation, natural beauty, economic and social values.

What is the prescription? To achieve healthy forest ecosystems in the Interior West, several things need to be done:

- Act now to restore watershed health and sustainability.

- Work on solutions together with all parties and at the local level. Participants should include the Federal government, State, local and Tribal governments, community groups, and citizens.

- Select the combination of measures that will achieve the best result. Successful restoration includes: prescribed fire and other fuels treatment, thinning, watershed restoration and pest management.

- Maintain strong fire and hazardous fuel reduction programs and pest prevention and suppression programs. The expanding urban-wildland interface makes prevention and suppression more essential than ever before.

- We must continue broad-scale monitoring to know where areas are at risk, determine trends and judge the effectiveness of our decisions.

- Find ways to work together over the long haul. We didn't get here overnight and long-term commitment is necessary.

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Healthy Forests Make a World of Difference