

Wildland Fire Use - Ochoco National Forest 2008

In July 2008, the Ochoco National Forest implemented a new option for managing wildland fire. The forest developed a "Wildland Fire Use" (WFU) Guide that describes specific conditions under which a fire may be managed for resource benefits. Resource benefits from fire use may include: hazardous fuels reduction, wildlife habitat

Wildland Fire Use (WFU) is the management of naturally ignited fires, such as those started by lightning, to achieve resource benefits, where fire is a major component of the ecosystem.

Many natural resource values can be enhanced by allowing fire to play its natural role where private property and social values can be protected.

improvement and restoration of fire's natural role in a fire-adapted ecosystem. Each time a new lightning fire starts, forest managers must assess whether the fire needs immediate suppression action or if conditions favor that the fire be managed for resource benefits. Considerations such as values at risk, firefighter

safety and costs are factored in to the assessment and subsequent decisions. Each fire is evaluated on a case-by-case basis and forest managers use criteria outlined in the WFU Guide to inform their decisions. The Ochoco Wildland Fire Use Guide is unique in that it covers the entire forest and is not restricted to wilderness or unroaded areas. The Ochoco's WFU Guide is a living document and, as we gain more experience and knowledge about managing WFU fires, the guide will be updated and refined.

The 1995 "Mill Prescribed Natural Fire" (PNF) gave the Ochoco National Forest its first experience with managing wildland fire for resource benefits in the wilderness. The fire was started by a late September lightning storm, and eventually

burned about 1,250 acres within the Mill Creek Wilderness. The fire burned actively for 12 days before it was extinguished by season-ending rains.

The positive benefits of the Mill Prescribed Natural Fire in reducing hazardous fuels and fire potential became apparent five years later when the "Hash Rock Fire" burned 18,000 acres in and around the Mill Creek Wilderness. The fire burned with high intensity, killing trees on 50% or more of the fire area. While much of the Wilderness outside the 1995 Mill PNF burned intensely, the area within the Mill Prescribed Natural Fire where fuels had been reduced, remained largely unaffected. The 2000 Hash Rock Fire made significant uphill runs on three sides of the Mill PNF area, but did not burn through it, as seen in the photos.

The addition of Wildland Fire Use as a management tool on the Ochoco National Forest will enhance our ability to meet resource management goals and restore natural fire as component of a healthy ecosystem. While Wildland Fire Use is an important new management tool, we plan to continue to actively suppress wildfires that threaten adjacent lands or have a high potential for unwanted resource effects.

For more information regarding WFU visit the following website: www.fs.fed.us/fire/fireuse/wildland_fire_use/use_index.html



Hash Rock Fire (August 2000) and Mill Creek Prescribed Natural Fire (September 1995). Ochoco National Forest. Photo courtesy Tom Iraci

Hash Rock Fire (August 2000), Ochoco National Forest. Photo courtesy Tom Iraci

Wildland Fire Use Management Teams

Wildland Fire Use Management Teams bring unique tools and skills needed to measure risk assessment and fire growth projections. They provide local land managers with skilled personnel who can be on site to advise and assist with the management of Wildland Fire Use (WFU) and prescribed fires. Teams are available as an inter-agency resource for assignment to all agencies and units.

To support decision-making, improve planning, and ensure decisions are based on the most accurate and current science available, the teams study the history of an area including fire frequency, fuel types, terrain, and historical weather patterns to support decision making.