

**Ochoco and Deschutes National Forests,  
and Prineville District, Bureau of Land Management  
Office of Communications**

*Working as One to Serve Central Oregon*

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**PARTNERS ASSIST FOREST SERVICE IN RESTORING AN ASPEN STAND**

PRINEVILLE- Quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) are perhaps best known for the beautiful hues of yellow and gold that the leaves become during the fall season. When walking through the forest in early summer, you may be lucky enough to hear the aspen leaves tremble in a slight breeze or cast your eyes upon the contrast of the bright green disk-shaped leaves that stand out against a forested backdrop of deep green conifers.

The sad fact is, that quaking aspen stands are slowly, and surely, diminishing. Since settlement times, aspen-dominated lands in the West have decreased by approximately 9.6 million acres. Along with the aesthetic values lost, aspens are valuable in providing for landscape and biological diversity, sites for recreational opportunities, watershed protection and key habitat for wildlife. Mature aspen form a key habitat component for elk and a multitude of other wildlife including forest grouse, mule deer, woodpeckers, small mammals, song birds/migratory birds and raptors.

A variety of factors have contributed to the decline of aspen, such as a lack of periodic “cool” ground fire, and the browsing of young trees by deer, elk and livestock grazing. Given the current contributing factors to the aspen’s decline, it is predicted that most aspen stands will eventually be replaced by conifers, sagebrush or other tall shrub plant communities.

Forest Service land managers have identified methods for treating the aspen stands with the hope that some can be restored, not only for future generations to enjoy but also for increased health and diversity and benefit to the ecosystem. Various methods, such as controlled burning, cutting and fencing, can be used to enhance the aspen’s ability to survive and, more hopefully, thrive.

One such effort to treat and restore an aspen stand is on the Ochoco National Forest, Paulina Ranger District, in Grant County, OR. A perennial tributary of Sunflower Creek runs through the project area. This particular stand consists of a small number of mature trees with numerous aspen sprouts interspersed throughout. The aspen sprouts have been heavily browsed and damaged, primarily by wildlife use (photo #1). Approximately 500-700 elk, along with mule deer, antelope and a variety of other wildlife, utilize the greater Sunflower drainage as habitat.

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Photo #1



Photo #2



The aspen restoration project at Sunflower will protect and enhance 15 acres of aspen habitat in two aspen stands utilizing buck and pole fence exclosures (photo #2). The finished fence is approximately 6 ½ ft tall, per specifications for ungulate-proof fencing. Buck and pole fences are ideal for aspen restoration because once constructed, they require very little maintenance and can last for approximately 10 years, enough time for aspen sprouts to establish and grow above browse height.

A number of partners are working cooperatively with the Forest Service to complete the aspen restoration project. The project has two phases: 1) to decrease the competition for water and sunlight in the project area by removing pine and juniper less than 9” in diameter 2) and to build buck and pole fences to protect aspen sprouts from grazing by wildlife and disturbance from livestock.

The Forest Service completed phase one of the project in 2007 and partners are currently assisting with funding for material and labor for phase 2 of the project. Partners and contributors include the USDA Forest Service, the Capitol (Salem), Bend and Ochoco (Prineville) Chapters of the Oregon Hunters’ Association, the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the Training and Employment Consortium and YCC of Grant County. In 2008 alone, partner contributions to this project totaled \$9500 for materials, not counting the labor. On the weekend of June 21, 2008, volunteers from the Oregon Hunters Association and the National Wild Turkey Federation groups will construct the fence, continuing a yearly tradition of volunteering their time to do the hard work of implementing habitat improvement projects on the Paulina Ranger District.

“We are very fortunate to be working with partnering organizations who are generous of their time and funding. The district is looking forward to a successful outcome of this restoration project,” said Acting Paulina District Ranger Slater Turner.

Other planned and implemented forest enhancement projects in the area include the installation of four wildlife guzzlers in the Sunflower drainage; 4,500 acres of controlled burns; and thinning and planting of chokecherry, bitterbrush and mountain mahogany to enhance browse forage. For additional information on the Sunflower Aspen Restoration Project, contact Paul Smith at (541) 477-6920.