

The Sacramento District Review

4 Lost Lodge Rd, Cloudcroft, NM 88317

575-682-2551

Rocky Mountain Research Station Part II



-Todd A. Rawlinson

The Rocky Mountain Research Station (RMRS) is studying the effects of fuels-reduction treatments on Mexican Spotted Owls and their prey in the Sacramento Mountains of New Mexico.

One challenge facing Forest Service managers is that much of the landscape is dominated by overstocked stands resulting from years of fire suppression.

These stands are rich in fuels, and these fuels make wildfires difficult to control, placing lives, property, and natural resources at risk. Managers are moving forward with treatments aimed at reducing forest fuels and wildfire risk.

Information on the effects of thinning on

threatened and endangered species and their habitat is limited and the need for research based decisions is vital. The RMRS and Lincoln National Forest hope to identify approaches that will conserve habitat for Mexican Spotted Owls and their prey while reducing the risk of catastrophic fire, protecting lives and property values.

The goal is to restore the forest and recover populations of threatened and endangered species.

Sampling includes:

- Owl demography through yearly inventory and reproductive visits to owl territories to establish occupancy rates and estimate survival and reproductive rates.
- Prey abundance and species diversity.
- Owl diet composition by examining remains found in

regurgitated owl pellets.

- Owl nesting habitat, by comparing vegetation composition and structure at nest sites with surrounding areas.

Over the last 9 years, RMRS scientists have continued to work with the Lincoln National Forest to identify data potentially useful in correlating fire risk, thinning effects, and landscape characteristics with owl demographic rates.

In the enduring words of Gifford Pinchot; "Conservation is the foresighted utilization, preservation and/or renewal of forests, waters, lands and minerals, for the greatest good of the greatest number for the longest time."

Adult Mexican Spotted Owl



By all these lovely tokens September days are here, With summer's best of weather And autumn's best of cheer.

-Helen Hunt Jackson



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Prescribed Fire as a Management Tool



Walker Prescribed Burn May 2010

- Mark Cadwallader

The Lincoln National Forest uses a variety of vegetative management tools to improve forest health. In April and May of 2010, the Sacramento Ranger District completed the Walker prescribed burn project of approximately 1,270 acres, east of Weed.

While the overall project culminated with the burn which was highly visible to visitors and residents, the project involved a number of other management tools used to prepare the area for the burn.

The first part of the project involved hand cutting of thick

piñon juniper stands in five acre blocks, leaving only 4 to 5 of the largest trees per acre. The blocks were cut in a mosaic

pattern leaving uncut buffers of 50 to 200 feet between the blocks to maintain adequate cover for wildlife. The cut areas were then opened for commercial and personal fuel wood permits.

In ponderosa pine dominated canyon bottoms, approximately 240 acres within the project area were commercially thinned to a density level of 40 to 70 trees per acre. Two wildlife water points were constructed in the project area to increase water availability. In the spring of 2010, conditions offered an opportunity to implement the last phase of the multi-year project which involved prescribed fire.

The primary objective of the planned burn was to clean up slash generated by the project. This would allow for increased vigor and availability of browse and forbs, and decreased fire risk by reintroducing fire into the ecosystem under favorable conditions.

Effective use of prescribed fire as a management tool includes balancing factors such as temperature, relative humidity, wind, and fuel moisture in conjunction with fuel type and topography. Tremendous amounts of planning go into each prescribed burn to minimize risk and provide for fire fighter safety and protection of private property.

Smoke generated by prescribed burns can be a concern for residents. Smoke management is administered by the NM Environmental Department Air Quality Bureau.

Smokey's 66th

On Saturday, August 7th the Sacramento Ranger District hosted a 66th birthday party for our beloved Smokey Bear. Guests sang Happy Birthday to Smokey and helped him blow out candles on his very special cake. It was a wonderful turn out of children and adults who met and took photos with Smokey. The party was a great success!!



Summer Office Hours

The Sacramento Ranger District Office is located in the Village of Cloudcroft, at #4 Lost Lodge Road, one mile south of Highway 82 on Highway 130. We are open Monday - Friday 7:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. & Saturday 7:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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Prescribed Fire as a Management Tool Cont.



Firefighters watch over the Walker prescribed burn.

The Forest Service works closely with this agency to ensure smoke generated from prescribed burn projects does not become a health issue for affected area residents.

Traveling between Weed and Piñon along Highway 24 will take a person right through the project area where they can see the results of a successfully implemented prescribed burn.

Don't be surprised if there is a lot of wildlife inside the burn area. Wildlife are attracted to burn areas because there is a flush of new nutritious growth after fire. Monitoring data will continue to be collected in the

Walker project area to determine the long-term effects of the project as well as guide managers in the implementation of future projects.

In 2009, the Lincoln National Forest approved the use of another management tool designed to gradually introduce wildfire back into forest ecosystems allowing wildfire to fulfill its natural role. The tool involves utilizing wildfire started under natural conditions (lightning) to be managed for multiple resource objectives.

- The Lick Ridge management area has been chosen by the Sacramento Ranger District as an initial location to implement this. This area is roughly 41,000 acres or 64 square miles and is located in the very southern portion of the district in the Piñon Draw area.
- Managing wildfire for multiple objec-

tives which includes resource benefit is another tool, along with prescribed fire and thinning, that can be used to achieve resource objectives, including; protection of values at risk such as area resources, communities at risk, improvements, and communication sites.

- If a wildfire starts naturally, different objectives and tactics can be used in different parts of the fire. This process will utilize the Wildland Fire Decision Support System, and takes into consideration local conditions that govern fire behavior such as weather, topography and fuels, as well as the needs of communities and cooperating agencies.

The Sacramento Ranger District is coordinating this effort with local volunteer fire chiefs, residents, and Otero County officials. Please contact the District with questions at (575) 682-2551.

Slash Pit Schedule

The slash pit will be open Saturday September 11th and Saturday September 25th from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

School, Effort, and Play.
Trying your best Each hour of the day, Making new friends, Being good as you can Exciting discoveries, Reading books with a friend.

-Boni Fulgham

Creating a healthy forest with fire.

