

# Collaborating to Increase Fire-adapted Forest Restoration

BY PETE CALIGIURI AND ED KEITH

Over the past 10 or more years, forest collaborative groups have proliferated across the Pacific Northwest to address some of the most pressing forest and watershed restoration and management challenges we face. Restoration efforts in dry, fire-adapted forests is a good example of one such challenge facing forest collaboratives in southwest, central, and eastern Oregon.



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Analysis by The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Forest Service demonstrated the immense scale of active forest restoration needed across the fire-adapted forests in Oregon; more than 6.5 million acres (nearly 4 million of which are on federal forestland) are in need of active restoration, including the use of prescribed fire to increase



PHOTO COURTESY OF ALLY STEINMETZ

## Collaborative stakeholders and partners at work on the Deschutes National Forest.

forest resilience to natural disturbances and reduce wildfire risk to local communities.

Beyond the sheer challenge of restoration at the scale commensurate with the ecological need is the challenge of re-introducing prescribed fire in forest types that depend upon this critical natural process but haven't seen fire in nearly a century. Moreover, doing so in the context of today's human-dominated landscapes, where multiple ecological, economic, and

social values (think recreation, forest resilience, aesthetics, wildlife, timber, community wildfire protection, and more) are layered on every acre of our forests, means that collaboration is required to find solutions that will meet these varying needs.

In central Oregon, local collaborative stakeholders and partners have stepped up to take on this challenge. And while we recognize that restoration in our dry fire-adapted forest types involves multiple steps, including commercial and non-commercial thinning, brush mowing, and prescribed fire, the final step of restoring fire is all too frequently the activity that is not being completed.

In response, over the past two years stakeholders representing tribal, state, and federal land managers, local elected officials, landowners, recreation groups, conservation and environmental organizations, scientists, private citizens, loggers, and forest products industry have been working together to address the challenges and opportunities to increase the use of prescribed fire as a critical step in the larger forest restoration process.

We started by engaging local, regional, and national experts to better understand the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of our current prescribed fire paradigm. We then used this information to advance a strategy that balances stakeholder val-



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SAFR Project Prescribed Fire – May 7, 2017



Milli Wildfire – September 6, 2017

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**Comparison between prescribed (top) and wildfire smoke from the same vantage point along Highway 20 traveling toward Sisters, Ore.**

ues in our fire-adapted forests, while also addressing two important barriers that are limiting the use of prescribed fire at a meaningful scale on the Deschutes National Forest. Those identified barriers were state-level prescribed fire smoke management regulations and community social license for prescribed burning.

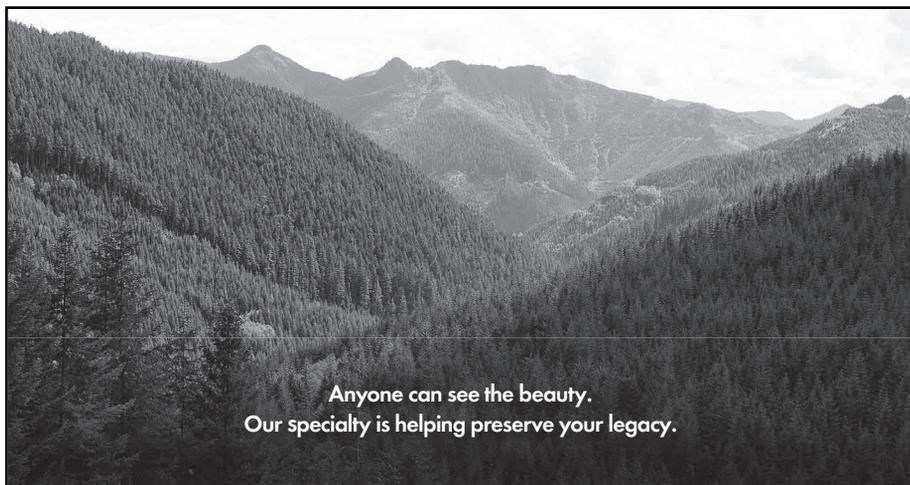
**Addressing challenges and opportunities to prescribed burning**

On the first issue, local collaborative members played a central role in building a coalition of collaborative members and partners across the state working together to envision a more holistic approach to prescribed fire

smoke management. In this case, the diversity of stakeholders driving this process translated into a network of highly effective and trusted messengers advancing proactive solutions with a coordinated, unified voice during the statewide Smoke Management Plan Review Process led by the Oregon Department of Forestry and Department of Environmental Quality.

It was through this collaborative coordination effort that novel approaches to proactive communications and community outreach strategies surrounding prescribed fire, smoke, and public health began to emerge.

In central Oregon, this translated into an effort to expand our already



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“big-tent approach” to collaboration by inviting new partners from our region to join the effort. This included launching a new collaborative group with a range of “non-traditional” partners, such as county health services, air quality regulators, and public health experts, many of whom came together for the first time to work alongside forest and fire managers to discuss challenges and opportunities related to prescribed burning, smoke, air quality, and public health. The effort culminated in the creation of a

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