

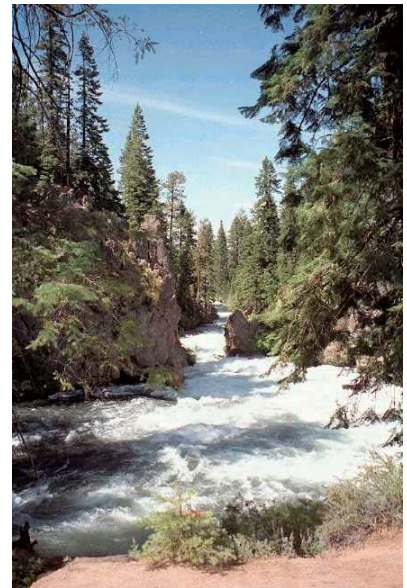
Restoring Fire Adapted Ecosystems A USFS/USDI/TNC Cooperative Project

The Upper Deschutes Basin

The 2 million acres of the Upper Deschutes Basin stretches from the crest of the Cascade Mountains to the junction of the Deschutes and Metolius Rivers at the southern edge of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation. It is an extremely diverse landscape, ranging from high alpine meadows in the west to dry juniper and sagebrush ecosystems at the edge of the central Oregon high desert in the east. The majority of the land (71%) in the basin is under federal or tribal management.

The Issues

As in so many areas in the American west, the fire regimes of the Upper Deschutes Basin are moderately to severely altered from their historical frequency and intensity. Over 63% of the landscape suffers from the alteration of key ecosystem components. To add to the challenge, the project area encompasses a complex wildland-urban interface zone, demanding a coordinated effort between all partners to find solutions to these challenges.



The Upper Deschutes River,
southwest of Bend, OR.

Partners Making a Difference

Through the Fire Learning Network (FLN), a component of the cooperative project *Restoring Fire-Adapted Ecosystems*, the partners and scientists have teamed up to develop approaches to dealing with hazardous fuels reduction, community protection and ecosystem restoration. The FLN Upper Deschutes Basin project team leader is a Nature Conservancy employee working under a Challenge Cost-Share Agreement with the Deschutes National Forest. The team leader also serves on the Ecosystem Working team of the BLM Upper Deschutes EIS/RMP process and the High Desert Museum Fire Education Advisory committee. The Deschutes County Planning Department is coordinating the development of a new sub-division that is based on FireWise concepts, and the FLN team leader sits on the project's Advisory Committee. A Student Conservation Corps team has also been integrated into the community assessment process.

The Upper Deschutes Basin FLN landscape team includes representatives from:

- Central Oregon Fire Mgt. Services
- Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council
- Central Oregon's Fire Chiefs Assoc.
- Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs
- Deschutes and Ochoco National Forests
- Deschutes County Planning Department
- Deschutes County Project Impact
- High Desert Museum
- Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife
- Oregon Department of Forestry
- Oregon State University Extension
- Prineville BLM
- The Nature Conservancy of Oregon
- Upper Deschutes Watershed Council
- Walker Range Fire Protection Assoc.

Solutions

The Upper Deschutes Basin landscape team is working to communicate ecosystems concepts and build a scientific basis for landscape-scale fire management planning. Their strategies include:

- Integrating state and federal fuels treatment priorities by identifying mutual hazards, risks and potential for loss surrounding each area. The Oregon Department of Forestry identified 18 “Communities at Risk” in the Upper Deschutes Basin. The National Fire Plan has funded fuel treatment or community protection projects with La Pine, Sun River, Crooked River Ranch, Walker Range Protection District, Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation and the Central Oregon Inter-governmental Council.
- Developing a common database and mapping system identifying and highlighting the above communities' locations and status.
- Validating and updating existing vegetation data, fire regime and condition class maps on both public and private lands for Central Oregon through partnership with Sue Stewart and Jim Grace of the BLM.
- Generating or validating ecological disturbance and succession models for each vegetative community type in the analysis area, with Dr. Gregg Riegel of the Central Oregon Interagency Ecology Program. These models rely primarily on his research on the response of bitterbrush (*Purshia tridentata*) to fire and mowing treatments. A workshop utilizing modeling software is planned for this summer to further refine these initial models.
- Defining the appropriate quality, quantity and arrangement of seral stages and fuel complexes that result in fire safe communities and ecological integrity across Central Oregon. The team is in the early planning stages of developing spatial vegetation models for various vegetative conditions using the VDDT model. A workshop facilitated by Wendell Hahn of the Forest Service is planned for October.

Summary

Through committed partners and a variety of funding, fire management personnel in the Deschutes Basin are finding ways to help both community members and federal agencies reduce the potential wildfire hazard in Central Oregon, and restore fire-adapted ecosystems. In a true partnership, fire agencies are cooperating to share resources, programs, and public education efforts and shown that, together, we can make a difference.

For more information, go to: <http://tnc-ecomanagement.org/Fire/SiteInformation>
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