

Forest tours illustrate restoration

USFS policies changed after 1988 forest fire

By Alasdair McCondochie
Emerald Contributor

The Willamette National Forest Service is conducting tours to show the public some of the newest ideas for forest preservation and restoration.

The tours take place four miles south of Oakridge, at the site of the 1988 Shady Beach fire, which burned 9,163 acres of forest. It was the worst wildfire in the Willamette National Forest since 1910.

Many of the restoration plans in effect at Shady Beach have come from public input, said Patti Rodgers, assistant public affairs officer in charge of conservation education for the public in Willamette National Forest.

The tours will point out restoration efforts and illustrate changes in policy regarding management of forest lands, including the New Perspective plan, a collaboration on ideas to preserve forests that has been emerging nationally for the last three or four years.

One component of the plan is to leave large woody material at a fire site rather than burning it, as would normally be the case.

"We mimic the natural process that maintains productivity," Rodgers said. By allowing the wood chunks to decompose, vital nutrients are returned to the earth and a habitat is created for many "critters," she said.

Besides the New Perspective plan, elements from other restoration plans have been incorporated at Shady Beach, including "connectivity," in which connecting corridors of trees are provided as travel and migration routes for wildlife. The corridors are especially beneficial for amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals who may be stranded by the large treeless areas left after a fire.

Rodgers said some trees have been replanted and about 95 percent of unwanted logs have been removed. The planting of new trees is expected to be finished by fall 1991.



Photo by Sean Poston

The Forest Service has opened the site of the 1988 Shady Beach fire in the Willamette National Forest to public tours to demonstrate changes in forest restoration policies.

Rodgers said caring for the land is half of the Forest Service's mission. The other half is serving people. "Ultimately, it is with the people that we redeem our mission in its entirety," she said. "Our public is far more aware of and involved in our activities than ever before."

Rodgers said she realizes not everyone is happy with the new forest plans, but that's all the more reason for more people to get involved, she said.

One such person who has become involved is Dennis Lueck. Lueck, a forest ecologist and educator, leads Shady Beach tours to provide a learning experience for the people on the tour.

Lueck said the point of the tours is to let people know that forest restoration policies are changing.

People who are concerned about the forests are encouraged to voice their opinions on the tour, Lueck said. After all, the work the service is doing is

mostly for them, he said. "I talk about how forests came to be and the role of fire," he said. "Fire does play a number of extremely important roles," helping with the development of habitat and creating a rich variety of plants and animals their homes.

Lueck said the area varies in appearance. In some areas 100 percent of the forest is burned, in others the fire hoppedscotched across areas, burning very little.

Lueck said it is important to "broaden people's focus" toward the Forest Service. This tour is meant to help the public understand what is going on, he said.

The Shady Beach project is a good start for this because it informs the public of changes, said Lueck.

To find out more about the New Perspectives plan and tours, call Patti Rodgers at 465-6450.

Tours leave from the Federal Building, 211 East Seventh Ave., on the second Saturday and fourth Wednesday of every month through October.

Firefighters battle blazes

(AP) — Fires triggered by lightning last week had consumed more than 4,000 acres of Oregon forests by Monday, authorities said.

The Spring Butte fire near La Pine grew to 935 acres Monday while smoldering brush on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation re-ignited and consumed 146 acres. The Corral Basin blaze near John Day had destroyed 880 acres, according to state and federal fire managers.

The Spring Butte fire six miles southeast of La Pine spread from 850 acres Monday morning, said Dave Morman of the Deschutes National Forest.

Morman said the fire was about 20 percent contained and crews hope to have it fully contained by Wednesday. He said about 445 firefighters were battling the blaze.

Near John Day, fire crews hoped to have the 880-acre Corral Basin fire contained by Tuesday.

Jennifer Harris, a spokeswoman for the Malheur National Forest, said 580 firefighters were battling the blaze while planes and helicopters dumped water and fire retardant. Another 240 firefighters have been called in, she said.

Harris said the fire has been difficult to fight because of strong winds and extreme dryness.

Jim Steele, spokesman for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, said 200 firefighters from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs and Jefferson County were working to contain the 146-acre blaze 20 miles northwest of the Kah-Nee-Tah resort.

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