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**Waldo Lake**

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der along the shore of the lake and then branch off and head up toward smaller lakes and the beginning of the Willamette River. The open terrain contrasts beautiful views of healthy forest on lake islands and other shores, with blackened stick-figure-like snags on sandy soils along the burned side of the lake.

Four years after the fire, the terrain remains a powerful reminder of the forest blaze that reduced the popular area to an ashed-out shadow of what it once was. Only grass has successfully reinhabited the burned area, along with scattered attempts from trees to regenerate the forest that once housed a complex, high-elevation ecosystem.

The 1996 Charleton Butte fire, which was caused by a series of lightning storms, smoked off 10,400 acres of the Willamette National Forest, including roughly one-third of the Waldo Lake Wilderness, according to Diana Enright with the Oregon Department of Forestry.

Parts of the fire were heavily suppressed because the Forest Service was concerned about inhabited areas to the north and east of Waldo Lake, Dale Gardner said. Gardner is the fire management officer with the Middle Fork Ranger District in Oakridge.

"This was a high-intensity, high-temperature crown fire," he said.

Although the fire was classified as a total mortality, it spared a few trees, which has led to some natural reseeding, Gardner said.

"Because the Waldo Lake area is a designated wilderness, reforestation will be natural and gradual because there will be no reseeding or human manipulation of the ecosystem," Enright said.

The fire left little on the forest floor to help reseeding, Gardner

said. The stand in the Waldo Lake area, which consisted mostly of lodgepole pine, mountain hemlock and true firs, is battling several climatic and stand-specific problems, along with the effects of the fire.

While lodgepole pines are serotinous — meaning they need the heat from fires to release seeds from their cones — fires are extremely destructive to true firs and mountain hemlocks that release seeds every year. Also, these trees grow slowly and take a long time to regenerate after a fire.

According to Stephen Arno's book "Northwest Trees," the firs

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Diana Enright  
Oregon Department of Forestry

will be late to come in after a fire because they like to grow in a shade that is not abundant after a total fire. Hemlocks grow in the shade beneath the parent tree, which shelters the seedling from the harsh elements of this glacial moraine climate and the direct sunlight that is plentiful after fires.

The increased visibility and sun exposure following the Waldo fire also had the Forest Service worried about the health of the popular fish-bearing lakes in the burned area, Gardner said. When the forest disappears, more sunlight reaches the water surfaces. This can raise the temperature in the lakes and rivers to where fish cannot adapt to their new environment and therefore die.

"It's a much different experience [now], but the fish are still

**How to get to Waldo Lake**

Take Highway 58 east. A few miles east of Oakridge, turn left at a sign for Waldo Lake. Follow this road to a sign for north end campgrounds and turn left. Park at the marina parking lot at the end of the road. The trail to Rigdon Lakes goes along the north shore area before branching off from the shore and into the woods toward the Rigdon Lakes. The round trip mileage from the parking area to the lakes amounts to about 8 miles, but the trail system leaves plenty opportunity for alternative hikes.

doing OK," he said.

Fires caused by lightning are a natural occurrence and a part of a healthy forest ecosystem, Gardner said. The Taylor Burn, a large natural fire in the early 1900s, destroyed much of the same area. This is a reminder that fires occur naturally, and in fairly set cycles, and any forest has a natural fire cycle. The interval between fires depends on the climate, species composition of the ecosystem and geographic location of that forest, Gardner said.

However natural, the elevation at Waldo Lake — ranging from 5,000 to more than 7,000 feet — provides for a fairly short annual growing season, Gardner said. This means that regeneration will progress at a slower rate than it would at lower elevations.

Although Gardner said rangers do not engage in prevention of natural fires, the wide variety in fire safety skills among area users forces the Forest Service to patrol the trails and heavily used areas around Waldo Lake.

"Rangers do spend time on the trails and sometimes find it necessary to engage in discussions about human-caused fires," he said.

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