

Forest thinning good for old growth pine trees according to OSU study

A new study by forestry researchers at Oregon State University (OSU) has found that old-growth ponderosa pine, even trees more than 250 years old, can increase their growth, improve their health and respond quickly to thinning that provides the trees with more water.

The research, just published in the professional journal *Plant, Cell and Environment*, may have important implications for the management of old-growth pine forests in the western U.S., scientists said.

Millions of acres of these forests are in very poor condition, suffering from a century of fire suppression that has led to vastly overcrowded conditions, inadequate water and nutrients, poor tree growth, catastrophic fire and huge epidemics of insects that prey on the weakened trees.

The new study, which used a technical analysis of carbon isotopes to gauge tree water tree and photosynthesis before and after thinning, showed that even

trees which are hundreds of years old can increase their growth and presumably their ability to resist insect attack if they are given a chance.

"Some people believe that old-growth ponderosa pine forests are decadent, that they can't really respond to the aggressive thinning that would restore conditions similar to those we had before fire was excluded from these forests," said Stephen Fitzgerald, an OSU extension silviculture specialist and expert on the types of pine forests that dominate much of the drier portions of the American West.

"We found that simply isn't true," Fitzgerald said. "This research demonstrates we can restore the health and growth of these forests even with trees that are hundreds of years old. Most likely, we will need to use a combination of mechanical thinning and controlled fire or other techniques that are appropriate to the site."

Such approaches have gained some interest and use in areas near the urban-

wildland interface in parts of the West the researchers said, but very little use to date in vast areas of interior old growth forests that are hugely crowded and in very poor health. This sets the stage for uncharacteristically intense stand-replacement fires or insect attack, particularly by mountain pine beetles, that will eventually kill the weakened old-growth stands, Fitzgerald said.

Historically, fire moved through many dry forest regions of the West as often as every 10-15 years, the OSU scientist said.

In areas suitable for ponderosa pine, this "thinning by fire" resulted in a park-like setting of 12-35 huge ponderosa pine trees per acre, with very little underbrush or other trees.

Trees 300-500 years old thrived - with some trees living up to 800 years - and these healthy ecosystems supported a broad range of other plants, grasses and wildlife species that were associated with these park-like old-

Tree-talking, gun-wielder in custody

A gun-wielding man Brookings Police officers arrested recently had been arrested earlier the same day, but was turned loose because there was no room in Curry County Jail.

Shad S. Erbinger, 32, had to be wrestled to the ground by officers arresting him after he brandished a gun at another man during an argument, police said.

Erbinger was charged with two counts of reckless endangerment, two counts of domestic menacing, harassment, and pointing a firearm at another person.

Erbinger had been arrested by officers earlier the same day for outstanding warrants; one from Josephine County and two from Jackson County.

The first arrest followed an encounter a woman had with Erbinger while walking her dog in Brookings, police said. She said that Erbinger, who "had been talking to a tree," jumped at her as she tried to walk around him, but was frightened away by her dog barking.

-Brookings 'Curry Coastal Pilot



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Webster's College Dictionary

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