

Rx: Fire

Igniting for
the future

By Kelly Kenoyer

It's like something out of Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* — firefighters set trees ablaze and fan flames across the grassland. This is the cutting edge in wildfire management and forest ecology: prescribing fires as medicine for sick forests.

Fire was a political tool in Bradbury's novel — a means of destroying literature and controlling the population. Today, wildfire and prescribed fire are politicized as well. What once was a force of nature is now beaten back, choked out and stamped by the great paws of Smokey Bear.

For more than a hundred years in the West, the U.S. Forest Service and its battalions of firefighters have held the untamable at bay, waging war against nature itself each time a dry forest caught alight.

But researchers and ecologists have realized that fire is instrumental to the health of forests and prairies alike, and now Oregon is struggling to rewind the clock and restore forests and other ecosystems to their pre-pioneer health.