

Public comment from:  
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The Federal Forest Advisory Committee in prioritizing proposals on federal forests, should consider two priorities that are linked together. One is more active management on overstocked dry forests that show extreme fire danger, to reduce fuel loading, thus reduce flame lengths when a natural disturbance occurs. Management actions would also serve economic, social returns to rural communities as well as improvement of the desirable and sustainable forest stand conditions. This is listed as a priority of this committee. Because even with management friendly, plan requirements, supportive laws, lack of lawsuits (all of which are problematic now) with aggressive action, it would take years to reduce the current fire danger. Therefore, when a wildfire occurs, it should be a priority to restore the area, so hundreds of thousands of forested acres are not lost annually. Active management (supported by the general public) after a catastrophic event, would provide economic return which would pay for planting, stream restoration and erosion control. In light of renewed interest in climate change, active management would also dramatically improve the carbon equation, by removing dead burned wood which gives off carbon and replanting seedlings which give off carbon dioxide. There are multiple benefits to more quickly and successfully restore conifer forests, restore sustainable rural communities, restore money to county services (with both priorities) and with current best forest practices improve habitat, and the environment more quickly.

How big of a problem is this? According to Interagency Fire website, in 2006 there were 3200 wildfires burning over 500,000 acres in Oregon. Eleven of the biggest totaled 450,000 acres, all lightning strikes. In 2002, a very big fire year, over 650,000 acres burned, 500,000 in the Biscuit Fire alone. The federal policy has been to recover very little of the burned dead wood and thus has no money for restoration of very many acres. The less than 2% of the land base that was scheduled for restoration, was protested and lawsuits filed. Some of the acres, in higher elevations on north facing slopes, in climates with predictable precipitation, and in areas with less severe fires, recover with natural regeneration. In drier microclimates on south facing slopes, where there are few if any seed trees left, there will be very little regeneration. The sites are being converted from conifer forests to areas with noxious weeds and brush.

I would suggest concentrating on these two areas i.e. active management of federal forests to reduce catastrophic events and restoration after catastrophic events. If those two areas were a priority, it would require looking at the reason these management actions were not happening. That would cause the committee to look at conflicting federal laws, lawsuits, and judicial opinions and also the BLM and Forest Service plan revisions.