Jackson County Cooperative Weed Management
Rogue Basin Partnership Newsletter Update, November 2020

ROGUE BASIN
PARTNERSHIP

After the burn- man vs nature?

The natural desire to reestablish vegetation after a fire is strong and for some of us even an emotional response. From an invasive species perspective, resisting that urge and reviewing risks and ecological post-fire basics may pay off in the long run. Note that here we're speaking strictly from the perspective of weeds and invasive species; erosion and other concerns are also key considerations in deciding how to proceed after a fire.

Wildfires create the opportunity for secondary succession, secondary because some legacy of the plant community that was there before the fire likely remains, for good or bad. If erosion is not a big risk, natural regeneration may be an option, but how do you decide whether to step in or let nature run its course?

While many site-specific nuances may come into play, two main factors will influence the natural process if left to nature's plan: the abundance of seeds/plant propagules (stems, etc.) and the resources available for the plants to grow (soil, nutrients, light). In the noxious weed world, the best-case scenario is where there are not a lot of weed seeds and yet still enough resources to support growth of new desirable plants. The worst scenario is where there are LOTS of weed seeds or propagules and plenty of moisture, nutrients and sunlight.

If you are lucky enough to not have too many weeds poised to take over, you may be able to watch nature evolve on its own. If that is a realistic choice, monitoring closely for new weeds is important. Be especially alert for the appearance of new plants and double-check that they are not problem invasive species.

If a weed invasion is likely, due to lots of seeds and abundant resources, there is a menu of possible management actions that address the two key factors of secondary plant succession.

Seed/propagule availability → Reduce it!

- Make sure vehicles, equipment and people do not bring weeds to the site
- Replant with natives or species that are not likely to become invasive
- Use weed-free seed--look for certification on packaging
- Monitor the regrowth, make regular visits, take photos

Resource availability → Reduce it!

- Replant something that will crowd out and starve weeds from the resources they need
- Cover exposed soil with mulch

Many site-specific factors may influence a land manager's choice. OSU Extension service, Jackson Soil and Water Conservation District and Oregon Department of Forestry all have

expertise and resources to assist private landowners with land management related to fire recovery.

Let's hope that the reappearance of vegetation on burned sites is a welcome sight as we move forward after this devastating event.

Recommended reading:

Barkley, Yvonne C. 2006. After the burn: Assessing and managing your forestland after a wildfire. Published by University of Idaho Extension for the University of Idaho Forest, Wildlife and Range Experiment Station, Moscow, Idaho.
https://www.lib.uidaho.edu/digital/fwres/items/fwres49.html

Brooks, M. and M. Lusk. 2008. Fire Management and Invasive Plants: a Handbook. US Fish and Wildlife Service
https://www.fws.gov/invasives/pdfs/usfws_firemgtandinvasivesplants_a_handbook.pdf

Hyperlinks:

OSU Extension: https://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec)
JSWCD: https://www.jswcd.org/
Oregon Department of Forestry: https://www.oregon.gov/odf/fire/Pages/afterafire.aspx)