

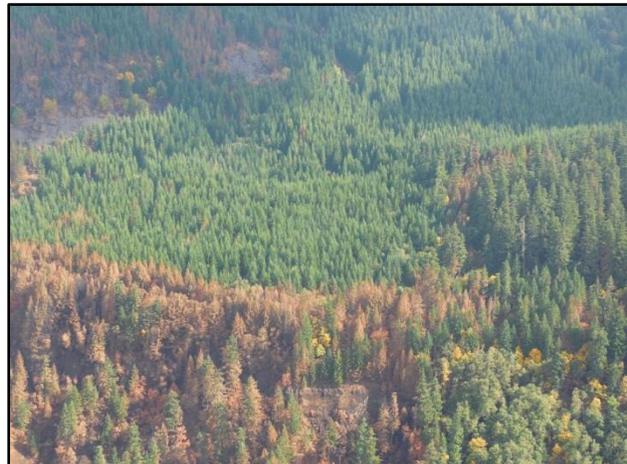
36 Pit Fire: a Story of Forest Renewal



The 36 Pit fire started on Sept 13, 2014 in the Clackamas River corridor along State Highway 224. It grew quickly and by the end of the first night had grown to nearly 1,000 acres. East winds and the heavily forested steep, rugged terrain factored into the behavior of the fire and how quickly it grew. Crews had a difficult time corralling the fire on the steep slopes, but were able to catch it as it tried to move out of the canyon and push to the west. Eventually they were able to get a line established around most of the fire, but a portion of it was too rugged and hazardous for crews to work, so fire line was not directly located on about 20 percent of its perimeter until eventually the fall rains arrived and helped to cool down any remaining hotspots.



Like many fires, the 36 Pit fire burned with a mosaic of intensity. Within the fire perimeter there are still many live trees and other unburned fuel. Some of the highest intensity wildfire occurred near the canyon rim, and includes the areas in the photos where the trees are black and have no needles left on them. The trees that were scorched and look brownish-red were also mostly killed, and, eventually, they



will turn to snags. Even some of the green trees will likely die as a result of the fire, primarily those where the base was burned and the cambium layer under the bark was extensively injured.

The steep slopes of the canyon are historically prone to erosion where rock and debris slides occur frequently. Debris from the steep slopes above has fallen onto the highway ever since the highway was constructed. However, post-fire effects may aggravate the situation, because the protective forest canopy has been disturbed or partially removed in places, leading to a higher potential for erosion. For the first several years after the fire, the steep slopes and rocky outcrops in the canyon will be prone to accelerated incidence of rockfall, debris slides, and tree pieces being transported down to the highway or into the river until brush and the forest start to grow back a protective cover.

But much of the forest that is still green will remain intact. Fires burned very lightly or not at all under the forest canopy, and undergrowth will recover quickly. New growth is already coming up under the lightly burned portions of the forest, which comprises about 80 percent of the fire area. New trees, being nourished by the decaying plant material, will soon replace those lost due to the fire as the forest recovers.

