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blue mountains FOREST RESILIENCY PROJECT

BLUE MOUNTAINS RESTORATION STRATEGY | SEPTEMBER 2015

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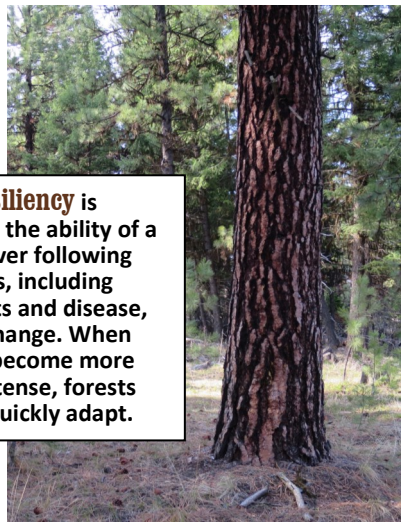
what is the forest resiliency project?

On the Malheur, Ochoco, Umatilla and Wallowa-Whitman National Forests, hundreds of thousands of acres of dry forest are in need of active restoration, but no implementable restoration plans are in place to complete the work. Without increasing the pace and scale of active restoration across the Blue Mountains, forest growth will continue to out pace active management. The Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency project will develop a plan for these areas, using thinning and fire to actively restore dry forests toward more resilient conditions. This project will also develop fuel treatments to modify fire behavior potential at strategic locations to facilitate safe and effective, large scale wildfire and prescribed fire management.

Desired outcomes of the Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency project include greater forest resilience to wildfires and insect and disease outbreaks, and conservation and increase of underrepresented forest conditions (such as old and large tree forests; open forest conditions; and habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant and animal species). Through active forest management, this project will contribute to local economic and social vitality.



Forest resiliency is characterized by the ability of a forest to recover following disturbances, including wildfires, insects and disease, and climate change. When disturbances become more frequent or intense, forests can't always quickly adapt.

why here? why now?

This year to-date, fires have burned more than 8 million acres nationally, which is almost 1.5 times the 10-year average.

While some of these fires are beneficial for fire-adapted ecosystems, unusually large and severe wildfires have become more and more common in dry forests across the west due to overcrowded forests caused by decades of fire suppression, past timber management practices, and climate change. These uncharacteristic fires can threaten human lives, property, and high value natural resources. Additionally, fire suppression

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Canyon Creek Complex August 2015
photo courtesy of the Malheur NF

what are the benefits of this project?

- Greater forest and community resiliency to fire
- Increased amount of open canopied, and large tree/old forests, creating resilient wildlife habitat
- Increased relative proportion of low severity to high severity fire, reducing incidences of large pulses of smoke from uncharacteristically severe fires
- A broadscale integrated analysis of where active dry forest management (thinning and managed fire) will contribute the most to forest resiliency, while making use of existing roads with minimal temporary road construction
- Improved wildfire management decision-making, incorporating scientific analyses of areas where fire will have desirable versus unwanted effects
- Jobs and supplemental economic benefits to local communities
- Enhanced dry forest amenities, such as natural scenery, native plant diversity, and more resilient habitat for high value resources such as elk, huckleberries, and fish
- Scientifically consistent data and analyses that can be used in other National Forest project plans, or to support multi-partner planning, implementation, and funding of landscape scale restoration with adjacent landowners

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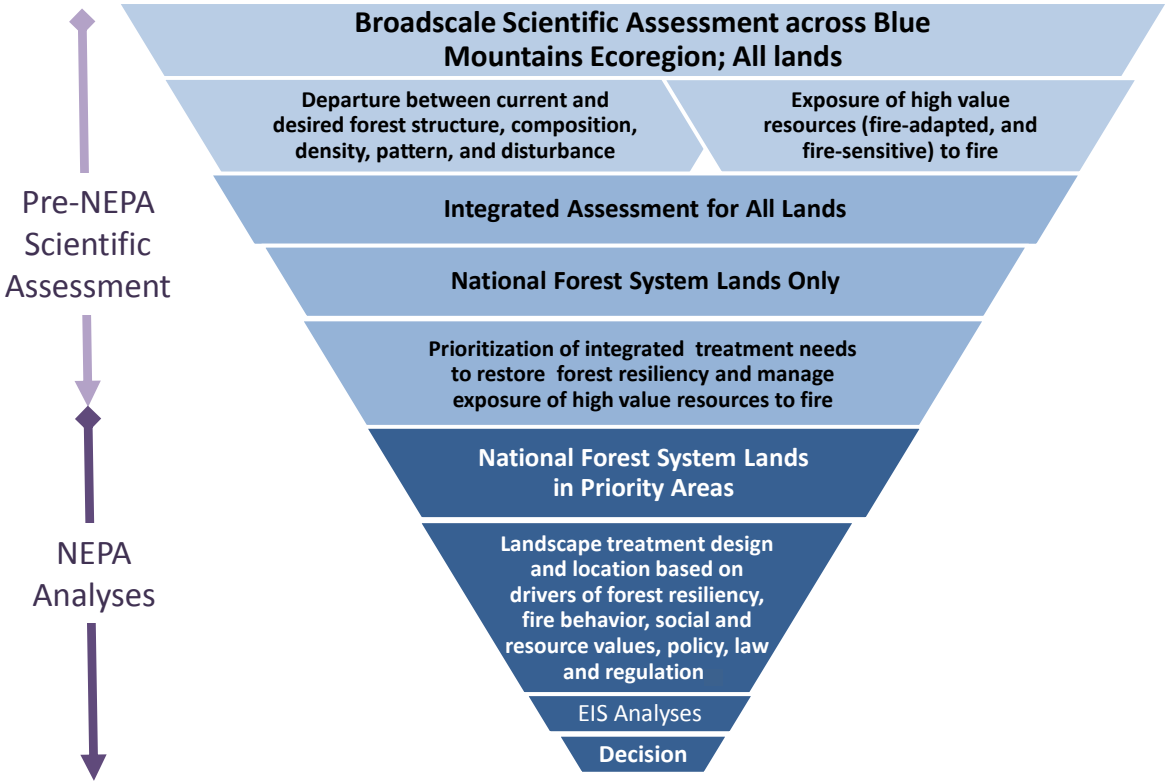
why here? why now? *continued.....*

costs are substantially increasing over time. In 1986, federal fire suppression costs averaged $75 per acre and $2,400 per fire, while in 2014 these costs averaged $420 per acre and $23,000 per fire. Forest Service budgets are unable to fund current fire suppression costs, resulting in funds being taken from other forest management programs that help reduce fire risks and improve forest resiliency. The cost of restoration work is significantly less than the cost of suppressing large and severe wildfires, but active management cannot be completed when the funding is not available. By increasing forest resiliency and creating strategic fuel treatments across the Blue Mountains, we can substantially reduce fire suppression costs, making this funding available for on-the-ground restoration.

A recent study revealed that more than 2.3 million acres in the Blue Mountains are in need of active restoration, with more than 1.6 million of these acres occurring on NFS lands (Haugo et al. 2015). Active management toward resilient forests depends on thriving local restoration industries. In turn, active forest management helps maintain jobs and consistency of forest products from National Forest lands. Increasing the pace and scale of active restoration will benefit the communities of the Blue Mountains economically, ecologically and socially.

To create future forests that are more resilient to changing fire regimes and climate, we must take greater action now to restore our landscapes, increase fire's beneficial effects, and reduce the exposure of homes and sensitive habitats to the unwanted effects of fire.

Blue Mountains Forest Resiliency Analysis Process