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Project Narrative
2003 Highlights, Accomplishments and Activities

Work on this project is centered on the Blue Mountains in Northeastern Oregon but the techniques developed eventually could be widely applied to other dry forests in the west. Project scientists and professionals participated in an analysis of the potential for hazardous fuels treatments in the Blue Mountains to contribute to the local economy by providing timber to area mills. This analysis (the Blue Mountains Vegetation Assessment) was conducted at the request of the former Governor and it concluded that a relatively small proportion (40,000 acres) of the acres identified as having excessive fuel loads could be treated without a subsidy given current policy and administrative restrictions. Altering policy to allow cutting of larger trees approximately doubled the area that could be treated without a subsidy but implementing the recent administrative change to allow "trading goods for services" by using receipts from acres with positive net revenues to internally subsidize acres with negative net revenues could approximately triple the area treated without a subsidy. If both changes are implemented more than 200,000 acres could potentially be treated without a subsidy out of a total of about 975,000 acres that have high stocking densities and are located in places where timber harvest is administratively allowed. Given the fact that there are about 5.5 million acres of federally administrated land in the Blue Mountains the spatial distribution of treatments will be important in determining fire behavior at the landscape scale. This analysis did not address whether the treatment of the acres that do not require a subsidy will actually improve conditions at the landscape scale.

Additional work suggests that passive management (no treatment) will result in development of dominance of single storied old forests on the Upper Grande Ronde watershed but that this process will take more than 300 years. Active management treatments such as those proposed in the Blue Mountains Vegetation Assessment would lead to the development of substantial areas of both single and multi-storied old forest structures on this landscape. These conditions would be favorable to terrestrial vertebrates (birds) that use old forest structures. The effect of these types of treatments was also assessed for the wildland-urban interface on a small area (about 20,000 acres) adjacent to the Upper Grande Ronde at the request of the La Grande Ranger District. This analysis suggests that these treatments will require relatively frequent maintenance treatments to control dense regeneration if gains in reduced fire hazard are to be sustained.