

Foreword

Conference on Fire, Fuel Treatments, and Ecological Restoration: Proper Place, Appropriate Time

Philip N. Omi and Linda A. Joyce, Conference Co-Editors

Fuel treatments and ecological restoration are not novel concepts to the land manager. Fuels have been manipulated in southern California since the 1930s, and ecological restoration has been advocated since the 1968 Leopold report re-defined the need for manipulating national park landscapes. Even earlier, advocates for light-burning of the nation's forests or for manipulation of wildlife habitat urged public and private land stewards to restore fire to regional landscapes. Perhaps if we had heeded their words we might have been spared the litany of "worst" fire seasons, such as 1988, 1994, 2000, and 2002. Of course, new circumstances have surfaced in response to these fire seasons, most notably the healthy forests initiative, national fire plan, and cohesive strategies for dealing with the nation's wildfire problems. Unlike previous agency mandates, the national fire plan has been accompanied with dollars to perform treatments—and dollars for which we are owed accountability. Still, numerous questions remain unresolved about the proper place and appropriate time for fuel treatments, to say nothing about suspicions that ecological restoration might be a cover-up for getting the cut out of the nation's forests or other nefarious acts. In short, this conference could not have been better-timed in terms of serving the public interest!

This conference was born of a Joint Fire Science research project at Colorado State University looking at the status of our knowledge regarding fire regimes and fuel treatments. A glance through the contents of these proceedings reveals a much broader perspective—for this we can thank all who responded to our initial call for abstracts. The core of the technical program for this conference focused on fuel treatment for fire hazard reduction, and ecological restoration case studies (including ecosystem effects). In addition, we are pleased to include papers that examine treatment economics and social issues, fire regime considerations, and landscape planning perspectives. In addition to these same topical areas, poster abstracts cover studies of wildfire effects, methodological considerations, and monitoring guidelines. In total, we expect that this collection of papers represent a unique and timely contribution to the literature. Further we hope that these proceedings will provide an important reference for future efforts.

Levels of interest for this conference (i.e., abstracts, registrations, general inquiries) exceeded our greatest expectations, especially since we started planning shortly after September 11, 2001. Participants included nearly 300 scientists, land managers, students, and interested individuals from public and private sectors. Our hope is that the papers included here will shape the future of fuel manipulation and ecological restoration programs here and around the globe.

Special thanks are owed to the steering committee that provided invaluable assistance with planning and implementing conference activities. Members of the steering committee are noted below:

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*We add a special tribute to the memory of Paul Gleason, who served on our steering committee and also coordinated the four conference field trips. Paul had a special passion for the tasks confronting fire and fuels managers. He was an avid reader and discussant about fire research and an eloquent spokesperson for firefighter safety. Above all he will be remembered for his contagious enthusiasm and respect for the land.