



Ecological Restoration Institute



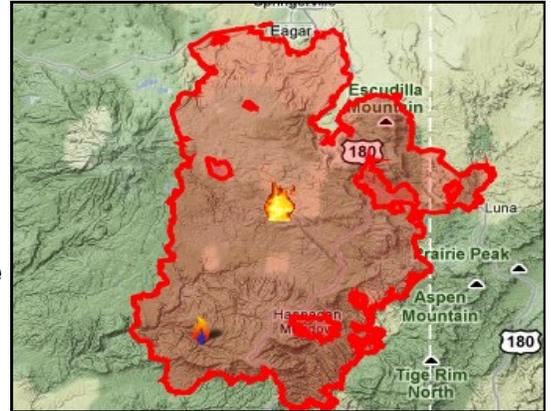
Fact Sheet: Lessons Learned from the Wallow Fire September 2011

Lesson #1 - We need to act at the pace and scale of the problem NOW—or be prepared to bear the cost of fires at the scale of 100,000 acres and larger.

The size of unnatural crown fires has increased exponentially in the last fifty years. In the 1960s, a fire of several thousand acres was considered large, during the last two decades fire size has increased to hundreds of thousands of acres in extent. The Wallow Fire, for example, was reported in both acres and square miles.

Lesson #2 - Unnatural crown fire is destroying critical wildlife habitat, such as old growth. The Wallow Fire reinforces the conclusion of the Mexican Spotted Owl Recovery Plan that fire is the biggest threat to owls' long-term survival.

Twenty years ago logging was the biggest threat to the habitat of the Mexican spotted owl, but in 2011 it is uncharacteristic crown fire. Estimates vary, but somewhere between 60 and 80 Mexican spotted owl PACs (Protected Activity Centers) were degraded or destroyed by the three major fires in Arizona this year.



Wallow Fire burned 840 square miles

Lesson #3 - The WUI fuelbreak treatments worked as designed.

The treatments caused the devastating crown fire to transition to a more controllable surface fire, which is what was expected when the treatments were implemented. While surface fire was responsible for the loss of some structures, those losses were most likely the sult of the homeowner not removing surface fuels from around structures in order to protect them.



Greer, AZ

Lesson #4 - Relatively small treatments embedded in an overstocked landscape can survive a high-impact fire.

The 150-acre ERI treatment, known as “Eagar South,” as well as several other relatively small U.S. Forest service treatments survived the severe fire behavior of the Wallow Fire. These promising results suggest there is an urgent need for larger, contiguous forest restoration treatments at the landscape scale to reduce the risk of a catastrophic wildfires like the Wallow Fire.

Lesson #5 - Comprehensive restoration requires action in mixed conifer forests.

Continuous, unnatural fuel loads across the Mogollon Rim are creating stand-replacing fire conditions in all forest types. This is a critical problem in less common forest types, such as dry mixed conifer and wet mixed conifer. We need to experiment with treatments that will restore these systems and return fire to its natural role.

Lesson #6 - High-impact fires are expensive to suppress and astronomically expensive to society and the environment when all costs are calculated.

Based on analyses of recent high-impact fires, the full-cost accounting for the Wallow Fire will approach \$1 billion dollars. According to an analysis prepared by the Forest Guild, the average cost of treatment for the White Mountain Stewardship Contract is \$538/acre. With that cost in mind, we could have treated every acre in the Wallow Fire perimeter for slightly less than \$300,000,000 and saved ourselves \$700,000,000! We would have saved even more if the wood was utilized and treatments were strategically placed to maximize effectiveness.



Mixed Conifer

The Ecological Restoration Institute is dedicated to reversing declines in the condition of forested communities throughout the Intermountain West, particularly those affected by severe wildfires and insect outbreaks. Our efforts focus on science-based research of ecological and socio-economic matters related to restoration as well as support for on-the-ground treatments, outreach, and education.

Ecological Restoration Institute, P.O. Box 15017, Flagstaff, AZ 86011, 928/523-7182, FAX 928/523-0296, www.eri.nau.edu