



Ecological Restoration Institute

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Conference Features Computer Games That Highlight Most at Risk Forest Areas

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz.- Mark Finney has been helping firefighters design their strategies for fighting wildfires from the Fire Science Laboratory in Missoula, Mont. since the mid-90s. Now, he's demonstrating another computer program - this one to help land managers identify forest areas most at risk for crown fires to help them prioritize forest restoration projects.

Finney, a research scientist with the U.S. Forest Service, will be sharing his work on spatial optimization programs with Flagstaff, 9 a.m., Tuesday, April 29, in the du Bois Center Ballroom at Northern Arizona University.

"One thing we really needed was a means to evaluate how successful fuel treatments will be," Finney said. "Some say forest restoration treatments are needed only in the urban interface, some say a band or strip around forest communities is needed, others say a wider area of treatment is necessary in the wildlands.

"But this debate has been taking place on the emotional level, usually without any data to help with the decision. What I'll be talking about is a quantitative method that will help land managers make and justify their decisions."

Data about any landscape can be entered into Finney's computer programs. For example, using Geographic Information System (GIS) data, local land managers can simulate how effective thinning efforts around Kachina Village would be in the face of a catastrophic fire.

"These computer fire models work like a video game," said Pete Fulé, associate director of the Ecological Restoration Institute at NAU. "You can select weather conditions and watch what a fire will do under different circumstances."

Finney's talk will kick off the Southwest Fire Initiative Conference, sponsored by the ERI at NAU. His keynote presentation will be free to the public. However, registration for the conference is \$12; \$16 includes lunch and parking.

The conference will be showcasing two years of forest research funded by the ERI through federal grant money. Topics will range from the ecological effects of severe wildfires to ways in which western communities are developing collaborative restoration projects. The conference is part of the Forest Festival, April 26 through April 29.

Registration and other conference information is available on the ERI website, www.eri.nau.edu.

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