

'Eco-Cultural Fire' - Rebranding Failed Prescribed Burning as Wildfire Fuels Management

Reestablishing our native species herbivory, including wild horses, can safely and cost-effectively make western landscapes wildfire resilient again

YREKA, CA, US, December 17, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Recently, some media has been showcasing the unproven notion that when Indigenous peoples use prescribed burning it's somehow safer or more effective than when professionals trained in firefighting use it.

As we have already seen time and time again, 'prescribed burning', also known as 'controlled burning' is extremely dangerous, deadly and financially costly in many ways even when used by highly-trained professionals.



Fire Attack helicopter drafting water from Iron Gate Lake during deadly catastrophic 2018 Klamathon Fire in Siskiyou County, CA

“

By learning from history and Nature, we can make American landscapes fire-resilient again today by the intelligent management of our herbivory populations”

*William E. Simpson II -
Founder/Exec. Director 'Wild
Horse Fire Brigade*

The most recent use of prescribed burning by professionals at the United States Forest Service (USFS) turned-disaster was experienced in New Mexico, where two prescribed burns went-wrong, joined together, and became the largest and most costly wildfire disaster in the history of New Mexico.

From the [Washington post](#):

"In a statement, the Forest Service said that what began as a controlled burn in the Santa Fe National Forest in January, meant to clear away vegetation and prevent

catastrophic wildfires in the future, turned into a “sleeper fire.” It overwintered beneath the

ground, continuing to burn slowly until it re-emerged in early April.

Fueled by strong, gusty winds, the Calf Canyon fire escaped firefighters' attempts to contain it.

On April 22, it merged with the Hermits Peak fire, which also began as a prescribed burn set by the Forest Service that grew out of control. In the month since then, the combined blazes have destroyed hundreds of homes and displaced thousands of people."

When it comes to 'prescribed burning', 'controlled burning' or as it's now being rebranded as 'Eco-Cultural Fire', playing with fire, regardless of who's doing it or where, results in disaster, time and time again.

An excerpt from a 2015 article from [Outside Magazine](#) titled, When Prescribed Burns Go Wrong, clearly shows that the disasters that stem from prescribed burning, are being repeated over and over, as are the evolving explanations and excuses for the disasters:

"Tom Scanlan's house burned down on an early spring afternoon in March 2012. Just days before, the Colorado State Forest Service had set fire to the dangerously overgrown forest near the Lower North Fork of the Platte River, about 40 miles outside Denver. The controlled burn was supposed to stave off a future blaze; instead, warm temperatures and high winds fanned a wall of flames that torched 1,400 acres, left three people dead, and destroyed 23 homes—even those like Scanlan's with defensible space. "They did a number of things wrong," says the 69-year-old former aeronautics executive, "but the biggest thing was setting that fire in the first place."

Each year, more people like Scanlan move into the so-called wildland-urban interface. Ten million new homes were built in these exurban areas between 2000 and 2010; over 30 percent of America's housing stock is now in the WUI. That means a growing number of people risk



Intensive ongoing close-observational study of wild horses in wilderness ecosystems has unveiled new understandings of their evolved symbiotic status with flora and fauna



A family of wild horses that lives in a remote forest have symbiotically grazed-in a fire-break, which is protecting a forest of champion old-growth conifers against catastrophic wildfire. Excess fuel loading causing abnormally hot wildfire that kills eve

evacuation, property loss, and death when these kinds of accidents occur.

In March of this year, high winds and temperatures rekindled an extinguished burn in Red Lodge, Montana, forcing 500 skiers off the local ski area; another burn, in Victorville, California, quickly exploded into a 70-acre wildfire that required evacuation of 25 houses. The fires aren't always so small. In 2000, the prescribed Cerro Grande fire near Los Alamos, New Mexico, torched over 280 homes. While residents have sued government agencies over burns gone wild, it's hard to prove negligence; it's more common to receive a small payout through emergency funds. (Those affected by the North Fork fire that destroyed Scanlan's home received approximately \$18 million from the Colorado government.)"

There are many more examples of prescribed / controlled burns gone-wrong and causing death and costly disaster. It's evident that any arguable benefits of these intentional fires is far outweighed by the adverse results of these prescribed burns.

Downside to prescribed burning areas of excessive grass and brush fuels, which burn abnormally hot:

In addition to becoming uncontrolled disastrous wildfires, causing death, loss of homes, businesses, infrastructure costing hundreds of \$-millions in losses, and thousands of Americans displaced with some made homeless annually, the additional adverse effects below are well-known:

1. Sends (volatilizes) thousands of tons of carbon-compounds / greenhouse gases into the atmosphere helping to accelerate climate change; and,

Basic Information		Current Situation	
Current as of	7/30/2022, 8:14:50 PM	Total Personnel	568
Incident Type	Wildfire	Size	30,000 Acres
Date of Origin	Friday July 29th, 2022 approx. 02:15 PM	Percent of Perimeter Contained	1%
Location	Siskiyou County, CA	Fuels Involved	Timber (Litter and Understory) Tall Grass (2.5 feet) Brush (2 feet)
Incident Description	Wildland Fire	Significant Events	Extreme Short Crown Runs Uphill Runs Spotting
Coordinates	41.819 latitude, -122.885 longitude		

USFS outlines '2.5-foot tall grass and 2-foot tall brush' in wildfire fuels detail



Horse droppings near a Juniper tree used by wild horses for shelter has survived a catastrophic wildfire. The horses removed fuel under the tree and scratched-off the low limbs (aka: fire-ladders) making the tree fire-resistant

2. Pasteurizes soils, killing the microbiome and native seed-banks, ending the life-cycles of some flora, impacting co-evolved fauna; and,
3. Loss of native-plants and their seed-banks impacts fauna that depend on native flora for sustenance including small mammals, birds and pollinators; and,
4. Creates hydrophobic layers in soils, which repel water and prohibit refreshment of ground water by annual precipitation; and,
5. Kills wildlife and destroys habitat due to abnormally hot fire that results from abnormally prodigious fuels; and,
6. Toxic smoke from wildfires (controlled or not) adversely impacts the health of humans for hundreds of miles away from the fire.
7. Fire-damaged soils are subjected to excessive erosion, which adversely impacts water quality for fisheries and damages spawning beds by silting-in gravels (redds).

The Questions That Arise:

Are prescribed burns the best way to go over the tens-of-millions of acres that is being targeted for burning by the government and NGOs who are lining-up for tax-dollars that are funding these failed fuels management paradigm?

*The most important questions goes unasked:

It seems that few people who are monetizing annual wildfires are interested in asking the single most important question in regard to the evolution of wildfire.

*Why now is the landscape suffering from over-abundant annually-occurring grass and brush buildup?

The answer to this most-important question is not climate change.

The answer and reason for the now massive buildups of annual grass and brush, which are the key fuels in over 60% of all wildfires, is that our native species herbivory has collapsed due to mismanagement. Prodigious fuels that grow annually, even in spite of climate change, are the root cause of catastrophic wildfires.

Government agencies are currently mismanaging wild horses, which are keystone herbivores in America, as well as other wildlife and large bodied herbivores considered and managed as 'game animals' (deer, elk, etc.)

One of many published peer-reviewed studies on the collapse of our herbivory and resulting evolution of catastrophic wildfire is titled; [Collapse of the world's largest herbivores](#)

An excerpt from that Study states:

“By altering the quantity and distribution of fuel supplies, large herbivores can shape the frequency, intensity, and spatial distribution of fires across a landscape. There are even unique interactions among large herbivore populations that can influence fire regimes. For example, facilitative interactions between white rhinoceros and mesoherbivores result in reduced fuel loads and fuel continuity, and consequently fewer large, intense fires (71).”

Just in California and Oregon over the past few decades, the population of deer have dropped by approximately 3-million animals (CA down 2.5-M, OR down 500k).

The impact of that loss of herbivores is critical to the evolution of catastrophic wildfire.

Those now missing deer in Oregon and California were consuming 3.8-million tons of grass and brush wildfire fuels. Now, we are suffering the effect of having 3.8-million tons of annual grass and brush wildfire fuels sitting-on the landscape, drying sooner and staying dry longer due to climate change, and fueling catastrophic wildfire.

The concept of prescribed burning being somehow safer or more sensible if done by indigenous peoples on today's landscape is highly flawed and fails to consider data from cultural archaeology and natural history.

Indigenous American peoples had no written language or alphabet, and therefore their oral history is subject to information handed-down in hearsay fashion.

Science shows this method of recording or recalling history leads to many errors and loss of data, increasing over time, resulting in an actual shelf-life of hearsay history of about 100-years.

In fact, the tribes in southwestern Oregon and northwestern California don't recall the important fact that, about 440-years ago, they lived-among and likely used wild horses.

Indigenous oral hearsay story-telling traditions have lost that important fact, which beckons the question; what else was lost via traditional hearsay oral history?

Nevertheless, that important fact was not lost to everyone.

Thanks to written history, and a documented observation made and recorded in the ship's log by captain Sir Francis Drake, we know that these indigenous peoples did in fact live among herds of wild horses. Drake, who sailed-along and explored the western coastline of America in 1580, did so just 90-years after Columbus first discovered America.

The accounting of this documented information is contained in the dissertation of Dr. Yvette

'Running Horse' Collin and can be read here:

<https://scholarworks.alaska.edu/handle/11122/7592>

As we see, the recollection of something as important as a resource like the American wild horse was lost to the oral history of the indigenous tribes of southwestern Oregon and northwestern California.

Why is this important to understand?

Because recalling the use of fire on the landscape by indigenous peoples is also subject to the loss of data.

For instance, during time that Sir Francis Drake sailed and explored the western coastline of America in 1580, there were an estimated 300-million more large-bodied herbivores on the landscape in north America.

Importantly, in regard to wildfire fuels of grass and brush on the landscape, these now missing 300-million herbivores made-up of deer, wild horses and bison, were grazing an estimated 383-million tons of annually occurring grass and brush.

This year-round native species grazing kept the landscape in a fire-resilient state, so when there were wildfires, they burned low and slow due to less fuels, and impacted small areas compared to today's highly-fueled mega-fires and giga-fires.

In previous history, indigenous use of fire on relatively small areas on the landscape back then was made relatively safe. And that's only because the landscape was already made fire-resilient thanks to populations of native species herbivores (plant eaters) that existed then, consuming grass and brush fuels. As a result, wildfires back then lacked the prodigious annually grass and brush fuels that we have today on the landscape, which are needed to fuel catastrophically hot and large wildfires.

That's no-longer the case due to our collapsed herbivory, making the notion that prescribed burning by indigenous people today (aka: Eco-Cultural Fire) is somehow magically safe or more cost-effective on the landscape of today.

How can we reestablish the collapsed herbivory and thereby, reduce wildfire fuels?

As we begin to understand, there is a far better and safer solution for managing wildfire fuels of grass and brush that doesn't lead to runaway prescribed burns and the addition of more greenhouse gases that exacerbate climate change, which dries these fuels earlier in the year, and keeps them dry longer.

For millennia, Nature's herbivory (animals that consume grass and brush) controlled and managed annually occurring grass and brush fuels.

By learning from history and Nature, we can make American landscapes fire-resilient again today by the intelligent management of our herbivory populations.

Step 1:

Rewild the inventory of 60,000+ captured American wild horses from costly taxpayer-funded off-range feed-lots, and put those wild horses back into designated critical wilderness areas that are both economically and ecologically appropriate using a plan called the 'Natural Wildfire Abatement and Forest Protection Plan (aka: 'Wild Horse Fire Brigade').

Step 2: Moratorium on hunting cervids in the wildfire prone western United States.

Step 1 helps to quickly begin to fill the native species grazing gap in our protected wilderness areas. However, even if we relocated all wild horses from areas where they are deemed to be in conflict with commercial livestock production (est. 50,000 wild horses) and targeted for roundups, as well as all the captured wild horses being held off-range in feed-lots, those 110,000 wild horses can only consumer about 605,000-tons of annual grass and brush fuels; a good start but not enough.

Assuming a 5-year moratorium of the hunting of cervids in western states, it will nevertheless require over a decade for cervid populations to being to rebound to the population numbers required to once-again, naturally manage wildfire fuels and make our western landscape wildfire resilient.

This Executive Summary of How & Why 'Wild Horse Fire Brigade works, can be read and shared via this PDF:

https://www.wildhorsefirebrigade.org/files/ugd/b50928_b546b19ef08441349993b0d3fd8111eb.pdf

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