

Utah Forest News

Utah Forest Landowner
Education Program Newsletter



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Committee Works to Maintain Forest Resilience and Promote Sustainable Fire Regime in Utah

As wildfires across the west increase in size, intensity and frequency, legislators and land managers are actively looking for new tools not only to safely fight fires,

but also to prevent them.

Following a particularly bad fire year in 2012 where 415,266 acres burned, Utah Governor Gary Herbert assembled a committee to find ways for the state to prevent and reduce the size and frequency of these fires.

An emphasis on fire prevention is becoming common across the nation as states like New Jersey and Colorado have recently ramped up their prescribed fire programs.

According to the U.S. Forest Service, every dollar spent on fire prevention saves \$17 in fire suppression. Funding cuts and events like the tragic Yarnell fire of 2013 have pushed the issue of wildfires further into the national spotlight.

By encouraging a proactive approach toward fire prevention, preparedness and suppression policy, the newly formed committee will be on the front lines of modern fire management.



Wildflower fire burned 1,754 acres in 2013, photo courtesy of West Desert Fire Management.

The steering committee assembled for this project includes fire management officials from state and federal agencies, county commissioners,

representatives from nonprofit organizations and others. The committee states that their “ultimate goal is to return landscapes to a condition of health and resilience that allows for wildfires to burn without becoming catastrophic to either human or natural systems.”

The committee has identified what they consider to be the major issues faced by Utah forests: an aging

air support fleet, budget constraints confounded by the uncertainty of long-term fire suppression

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and rehabilitation costs, and appropriate uses of management techniques such as prescribed fire and livestock grazing.

Another issue to be addressed is that of the declining wood utilization industry in Utah. As the timber industry in Utah has declined, the economic incentive (and infrastructure) to mechanically treat forestland has disappeared. The lack of public education on the positive role of prescribed fire and active fuel reduction projects was also identified as an obstacle to overcome as the state seeks to develop a more fire-wise landscape. The report authors recommend that a technical committee be appointed to further address specific concerns, such as community involvement, livestock grazing, and interagency coordination.

Additional recommendations include the creation of a better system for utilizing biomass resources across the state, the formation of regional working groups to identify potential needs and priorities, the

adoption of key recommendations from the National Fire Management Strategy (an organization that approaches wildland fire from a holistic perspective), and an increase in public understanding of forest health and the importance of fire. The report concludes with an overview of regionally significant projects that highlight fuel breaks and fuel reduction treatments.

While state legislation was passed supporting the Catastrophic Wildfire Reduction Strategy in 2013, certain funding requests made, including one aimed at increasing public awareness, were voted down during the 2014 legislative session. A long history of such acts creates uncertainty for fire and land managers who are tasked with upholding the commitments made by the steering committee described above. Maintaining forest resilience, protecting

the health and welfare of Utahns, and encouraging a sustainable fire regime in Utah will be difficult without the proper funding and support from the state legislature.

By: Sam Nielson, USU Forestry Extension intern.



Black Mountain fire burned 4,566 acres in 2013, photo courtesy: Utah Div. of Forestry, Fire and State Lands

Utah Forest News Goes From Four Issues to Three

The Utah Forest News has been published four times annually since 1998. The printing cost of the newsletter has risen while our budgets have not. Currently the cost of printing and mailing the newsletter four times annually is more than our operating budget. We receive assistance for producing the newsletter from the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and from the U.S. Forest Service, but it hasn't been enough. Thus, we have decided that the newsletter will be issued three times annually from this point forward. We appreciate your continued support, interest and comments. - Darren McAvoy

Utah Gets a New State Tree: Quaking Aspen

On March 26, 2014, Utah Governor Gary Herbert signed Senate Bill 41 in an unusual way – surrounded by excited students in the auditorium of Monroe Elementary in Sevier County. This bill changed the state tree from the blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), to the quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*).

The location of the signing was a tribute to the fourth grade class from Monroe who helped initiate the bill.

In an attempt to learn more about the political process, teacher Angie Blomquist’s students took the initiative to lobby for a bill of their own. The students’ idea was then sponsored by Monroe native and state senate majority leader Ralph Okerlund.

The bill, which had already been publicly endorsed by Governor Herbert, was presented in the senate by Senator Okerlund on January 24th. Citing the

Pando aspen clone of Fishlake National Forest as one of the largest organisms on earth, Okerlund spoke to the senate about the wide range of aspen across the state, as well as the history of the blue spruce, which was designated as the state tree in 1933.

Okerlund’s remarks were then endorsed by several other senators who raised their voices in support of the change. The bill passed unanimously with 21 yeay votes, and zero nay votes. Upon passing, the Capitol was filled with applause recognizing those Monroe Elementary students who were in attendance.

The bill arrived at the House of Representatives, where the conversation wasn’t quite as unified. The bill still passed with 54 yeay votes and 19 nay

votes, but not before several representatives raised concerns over the tree being unsuitable for residential landscaping, citing personal experiences with bothersome aspen suckers invading their own yards.

Many reasons were given for the change, some related to the nomenclature of the blue spruce, and others focused on the abundance of each species

across the state. The connection between Utah’s community spirit and aspen’s ability to grow together was also cited, and in the end the blue spruce was “cut down” as Utah’s state tree.

For scientists studying aspen decline in Utah, the change gives more attention to a



Quaking aspen Pando in the Fish Lake National Forest.

species that is struggling across the Intermountain West. Aspen decline has been linked to insect infestation, extreme drought, high temperatures, and browsing by wildlife; however, the root cause(s) of the widespread decline remain unknown and are still being studied. Quaking aspen is widely recognized as an ecologically vital component in wildlife and watershed ecosystems. This change offers forest and land managers across the state the opportunity to reconsider their own conservation efforts to protect a tree that provides Utah with both aesthetically pleasing and ecologically healthy landscapes, as well as calling attention to Utah as being the site of the world’s largest living organism.

By: Sam Nielson, USU Forestry Extension Intern

State Forester Talks to Forestry Students and Professionals

Utah's State Forester Brian Cottam met with the Student Chapter of the Society of American Foresters at a Golden Corral Restaurant in Layton on March 26. Cottam shared his background and provided some direction for the students on how to succeed in their chosen natural resources careers. He emphasized the importance of having a diverse background of experiences and places, and credits this diversity for putting him in the State Forester's position.

Originally from Tennessee, Brian came to Utah to pursue a liberal arts degree from Westminster College in Salt Lake City. After graduating he took a job as the director of the Southern Utah Forest Products Association in Wayne County. He lived in Torrey (population 300) for 10 years. Living in a small, rural community gave him a unique perspective on the challenges faced by smaller towns in Utah.

Cottam left Torrey to pursue his Master's degree in Forestry with a focus in policy from Utah State University. He was particularly interested in effective policy implementation and facilitating collaboration skills among diverse groups. After graduating, he accepted a position as the coordinator of the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership in Flagstaff, Arizona. It was in this job that he had a realization about the importance of interpersonal skills and how they can lead to a successful career. His ability to effectively cooperate with stakeholders of varying perspectives helped him be successful in this position. Cottam confessed that he never intended to remain in the forestry field, and even went as far as to call himself a

"reluctant forester". He explained that natural resources have always been the focus of his career, but program management, community planning, and administrative qualifications have all been essential components of every position he has held. Again he stressed the importance of acquiring a diverse skill set early in one's career that can be drawn on and added to over time.

In 2003 he left Flagstaff after being called on by Governor Huntsman to join his natural resource planning team. In this position he traveled the state, did extensive grant writing and relied on his ability to build strong relationships between government entities and the public.

In 2013, he began his current position as the deputy State Forester where he manages Sovereign Lands, Fire and Forestry and oversees 300 permanent and seasonal employees.



Deputy State Forester Brian Cottam (center) meets with Society of American Foresters students and professionals.

Cottam's take home message was simple: learn how to cooperate with diverse groups of people. He encouraged the students to hone their interpersonal skills, practice collaboration and continue to pursue a strong scientific education. He suggested a typical state forester might remark that their silviculture background was what led them to their successful career. However he would argue that his foundation in policy implementation, political cooperation, timely planning, and most of all his ability to effectively communicate and listen were all skills that led him to hold the important position of deputy forester of Utah.

*By: Darren McAvoy, USU Forestry Extension Associate
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The Efforts of a Local Bear River Forester Pay Off

Bear River Area Forester Morgan Mendenhall was eating, breathing, and sleeping tree planting this spring. More than 24,000 seedlings of a variety of species made their way onto private forestland in northern Utah due to the efforts of Mendenhall, his colleagues, and the long-term cooperation and interest of a group of ten landowners with properties ranging from 40 acres to 30,000 acres in the Bear River Mountains.

For Mendenhall and many of the landowners, the start of this process was years ago with a Forest Stewardship Plan. This document is the first step to become involved with Utah's forestry program that is helping landowners complete a wide variety of management activities on their land. Participation from landowners in their Forest Stewardship Plans helped Mendenhall successfully compete for the Landscape Scale Restoration Competitive Grant Program through the Forest Service. The landowners in this program also had to help provide a match for the \$300,000 grant, mostly with in-kind cost share such as helping plant trees. For one of the ranch owners, this meant putting considerable resources into cleaning up from poor logging practices that happened during the tenure of the previous owner. This involved countless hours

of hiring a trackhoe with a grapple claw to consolidate individual logs and excessive amounts of dead and down material. More than 1,500 piles were later burned by Mendenhall and his crew over the last several years.



One of Mendenhall's 24,000 tree seedlings planted in Utah.



Scott Zeidler, Urban and Community Forester, planting a tree seedling.

It is very important to get locally collected seeds for the best outcome in any reforestation program. Seed collection to start the seedlings began years ago, and it is the part that is perhaps the most important from Mendenhall's perspective. He uses a long pruning pole to get to cones he can reach. He prefers this technique to climbing the tree or cutting them down - two common approaches to cone collection. He collects the pine, spruce and fir cones that will eventually yield the needed seeds. After considerable trial and error over the years, Mendenhall contracted with Montana's Conservation Seedling Nursery in Missoula, Montana to store his collected cones and grow his seedlings on behalf of this group of Utah landowners.

One of the greatest challenges on this project was the logistics involved in finding a cold storage facility large enough to hold six pallets of trees and willing to store frozen trees alongside pallets of ice cream and beef patties. Each week included another challenge of estimating how many trees would be planted the following week and removing them from the freezer to ensure all trees were only thawed for a few days before planting.

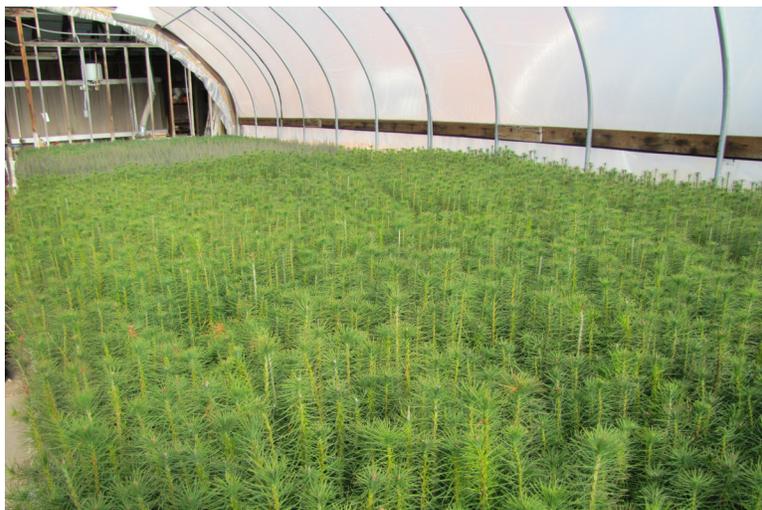
He is very pleased with the quality of the seedlings from this grower. This year's seedlings came full of vibrant color and healthy roots and foliage making them appear ready for their introduction to Utah mountain soils. He had a variety of species grown including lodgepole pine, Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce and blue spruce. For creativity and to hedge his bets, he mixed in some ponderosa pine and western larch, even though neither are native to this forest. The trees generally cost \$0.95 each to grow and another dollar or two to get planted.

Mendenhall emphasized that they were not planting on a grid; rather they were more interested in finding a place where the tree would do well; a micro-site of shade or protection from animals. He was aiming for 300 trees per acre, but that would depend on the availability of suitable sites for each tree. Usually the biggest hurdle to successful planting is getting adequate precipitation during and after the planting. This year he was faced with the opposite problem: many of the slopes he targeted for planting were still covered in snow during the season when it was cool enough to handle the trees without desiccating them immediately. His favorite

strategy was to get on the properties as early as possible and plant trees at the base of the snowline and around remaining snow drifts, while moving farther up the mountain from week to week as the snow melted.



Pine, spruce and fir cones ready for germination (photo courtesy Morgan Mendenhall).



Tree seedlings at MT Conservation Seedling Nursery, (photo courtesy Morgan Mendenhall).

Mendenhall would like to see regular funding available to collect and store local seeds to send to a nursery to grow tree seedlings. This way a landowner could wait as late as February to decide they wanted to plant trees and have them ready within 14 months. Currently it takes years to collect and then grow the seedlings. This timing issue and the additional risk of a seed collection failing because of poor seed production years and missed windows of opportunity is a barrier for many landowners. Mendenhall's experience is that the landowners he is working with on this project are very excited about having new seedlings growing on their land. He points out the potential to expand this program to other parts of the state so other landowners can participate.

By: Darren McAvoy, USU Forestry Extension Associate, darren.mcavoy@usu.edu



Restoring the West Conference 2014

Down by the River: Managing for Resilient Riparian Corridors

October 21-22, 2014, Utah State University, www.restoringthewest.org

Riparian areas are vital for water quality and quantity, biological health and diversity, and social values. Historically, riparian corridor management in the West has ranged from benign neglect to exploitation and purposeful destruction. This year's Restoring the West conference will highlight the function and benefits of these complex systems and how they can be managed for resilience in the face of climate variability and other pressures. There will be two days of plenary sessions and a poster session. Poster submissions are requested. Submit posters to darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.

For more information visit our [USU Forestry Extension](http://forestry.usu.edu/) <http://forestry.usu.edu/>. Follow the [@CNRUSU](https://twitter.com/CNRUSU), and [Restoring the West](#) on [Twitter](#) #RTW2014 and [Facebook](#).

Sponsors: Utah State University (Cooperative Extension, Wildland Resources and Watershed Sciences Departments, Quinney College of Natural Resources, and Ecology Center), USDA Forest Service – State and Private Forestry, and the Western Aspen Alliance. (Photo courtesy [Joe Wheaton](#)).

For more information regarding any of the information presented in this newsletter, please call Darren McAvoy at Utah State University, 435-797-0560, write to him at 5230 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5230, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.

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The Utah State University Forestry Extension website <http://forestry.usu.edu/> is an excellent source of technical forestry information for woodland owners.

State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire & State Lands service foresters for your area can be contacted by calling 801-538-5555, or visit their website. <http://www.ffsl.utah.gov/>

Ideas and written contributions to this newsletter are encouraged. Send your contributions or comments to the return address above or call 435-797-0560, or email darren.mcavoy@usu.edu.



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Utah Forest News

COMING EVENTS

Utah Arborists School: September 29 - October 3.
See website for details. <http://utahurbanforest.org/>

Restoring the West Conference -- Managing for Resilient Riparian Corridors: October 21 & 22,
Utah State University, Logan, Utah. See website for details. <http://www.restoringthewest.org/>

IUFRO World Congress 2014: October 5-11, Salt Lake City. See website for details. <http://www.iufro.org/iufro/>



Most of the Englemann Spruce on Wolf Creek Pass have died from the ongoing spruce beetle activity in Northeastern Utah.

