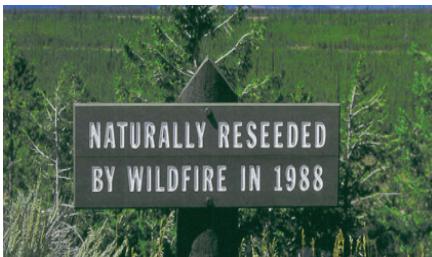


Seven

Best Kept Secrets about Forest Fires.

Photo: Paul DePascale



secret 1 Fire disturbances are a positive force of nature.

Many plants and wildlife depend on fire to create habitat, eliminate competitors, and release trapped nutrients. Dead trees provide food for insects, which in turn are food sources and future homes for birds and small mammals. Fires are the lemons from which forests make lemonade. While people cannot tolerate fire near homes and communities, fire is a forest's best-kept secret.

secret 2 Under drought conditions, thinned or clear cut forests will burn hotter than native forests.

From Yellowstone to the Cascades, large fires are primarily driven by drought and wind conditions. Logging companies either downplay or ignore these facts to convince the public that thinning the forest by removing "fuels" will reduce or prevent large fires. Although fuel is an ingredient of fire, many forests, like Oregon's coastal rainforests with a lot of trees and fine fuel rarely experience fires. In priority areas near homes and

communities, cutting back brush and thinning can be a valuable tool to reduce fine fuels if properly funded and maintained.

secret 3 Logging and fire do not function the same in a forest ecosystem.

Logging takes away valuable, fire-resistant timber and leaves only small trees and brush that easily ignite. Not only are logged forests more flammable, they also risk the introduction of insects, disease and invasive species that are harmful to the forest's balance. Fire, on the other hand kills the small trees and brush, turning them into food for the forest, nutrients for the soil, and room and board for wildlife. Older trees survive the flames, and the ones that do fall act as natural water bars, reducing erosion and stabilizing soils.



Photo: Blake Matheson



Photo: @TripJenningsVideo

secret
4

One of the best-kept secrets is that forests need fire as much as they need rain.

Just as drought and wind are the primary drivers of large forest fires, rainy weather is also the primary force that puts fires out. While firefighters work day and night to try to corral a wildfire and protect our structures and communities, weather is the primary force that determines how long a fire burns. Just as we cannot stop a wild river from flooding, we cannot stop large fires from burning unless the weather cooperates. Firefighters secure safety between humans and nature, which allows a fire to run its natural course and die out when the winds die down and the rains come.

secret
5

Fire does not destroy a forest or its wildlife any more than rain destroys a rainforest.

Disney has planted the image of Bambi fearfully running from forest fire, and we often mourn a burned forest as if it were a house. However, most forest wildlife possess the skills and abilities to survive fires. Most birds simply fly away, as fires typically burn late in the summer, after birds have nested and reared their young. Smaller mammals hide in ground burrows, and most deer and elk run away from the smoke and flames taking cover in streams, and near water. After the smoke clears, and ground cover is killed by fire shrubs and trees sprout from their roots anew, the birds return and feast on bugs.

secret
6

Forest fire mosaics nurture diversity and resilience.

Most fires burn in a mosaic pattern of varying fire intensity, leaving many areas not burned at all. While the media recites the acres within a fire perimeter and seeks out stark landscapes to paint a dramatic, destructive picture of fire, another best-kept secret is that fire burns at varying intensities and creates a flush of newly available nutrients and fresh incoming sunlight to the forest floor for rare plants and food for animals. The variable, mosaic burn pattern helps diversity and increase resilience for the next fire.

secret
7

Forests containing dead trees, known as snags, are one of a forest's best-kept secrets as they create shade, stabilize soils, and support the forest as it regenerates post-fire.

As soon as fire starts burning in the west, timber companies and their political backers promote post-fire "salvage" logging as a way to artificially restore burned landscapes. But they hide the truth – fire restores forests—and our forests have evolved over thousands of years to regenerate after fires. Hundreds of scientists have cautioned that logging sensitive burned landscapes actually hinders regeneration and increases fire risk. Removal of burned trees and decaying wood takes away one of the most valuable and rare sources of food and shelter in our forests.



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