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August 2017



## TREE FARM BULLETIN

### Restoring Fire to Our Ponderosa Forests

*By: Hart Allex, Tree Farmer*

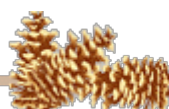
Why should we intentionally have fire in our forest? Because “it has always been done that way.” That is one of my favorite comments to explain the often unexplainable behavior of mankind. But, in this case, it is dead on target. The Ponderosa Forests evolved with fire, and they need regular ground fires to maintain in their ecological niche. Without? The disaster they have become, with crown fires running amuck. This is caused by man eliminating fire, first by eliminating the fuel-grass-that carried the fire by overgrazing. And, second, with a mistaken Forest Service policy to put out all fires “by 10am the next day.” Yes, that includes the “good” fires. Yes, there are “good” and “bad” fires. People need to know the difference.

So, my part in all of this? To get my forest back to the basics. The long term objective is to have natural grass fires again. That will control the baby tree population before they become Dog Hair thickets. The short term objectives to get there are? First, thin the forest to proper/historical density and eliminate the massive amounts of fuel that currently cause crown fires. The second objective is to get the ground vegetation back so “good” fires can burn across the landscape. Restoring the vegetation can be a task in itself after restoring the forest density.

The Dog Hair thickets, our forests have become, shade the ground and eliminate or subdue most of the vegetation. Even after cutting the trees, the vegetation is slow to return, in some places, because there is no seed bank left. Seeding is necessary. Other places have some seed, already, and just need sun and water to jump start the process. The extra sunlight pushes more seed production and the process continues.

The biggest job in all of this, besides moving the wood out of the forest-around 25 pickup loads per acre, is to eliminate the slash. Leaving it scattered on the ground encourages lightning strikes to do the job for you with the results found in so many prescribed burns gone wrong. Trust me, nobody needs that to happen in their forest.

Chippers have been used for limited acreage. On a landscape scale they are impractical, and finding a use for the resulting chips would be a monumental problem. A few inches on bare ground for mulch,



which is good, can't deal with the thousands of cubic yards of slash produced. We are removing around 85% of the trees in our forest. There can be so many slash piles, at times it is difficult to walk through them.

Leave the slash piles? A huge amount of needed vegetation will be lost as it can't grow through the piles. And, uncontrolled fire is still a possibility if they accidental light.

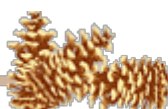
After weighing and trying all the options, I choose fire. Not because it is easy-NOT! Not because it is cheaper-NOT! But because it works. And when we are done, the vegetation can go crazy. A side effect is the easy access by vehicle or on foot-nothing in the way but the "leave" trees when we are done. Is there such a word in forest work?

So, how to burn slash, without fear? Uh huh, fear is an always present possibility. Risk is inherent when you light a match in the forest. Keeping the risk and fear level as low as possible is the primary objective. Don't want to wake up in the middle of the night after a burn and listen to the wind with adrenalin moving? Don't want risk and fear? Don't burn slash. Pretty simple.

I have been using fire in my forest since 2000. I had actually started thinning 13 years earlier. We left ten acres of slash on the ground and returned to Alaska to work. Upon our return home, I saw the slash had not gone anywhere, nor deteriorated to any extent, I know we had to do something else. We rented an industrial chipper and quickly learned how difficult and expensive (\$150 per day) that job could be. Still have piles of chips. Nothing grew through the piles. Needed to do something different.

At first we burned in the snow-no fear. But also very hard on us. People don't work too long with cold and wet hands and feet. And we missed lots of slash, to be dicovered after the snow melted. Then we tried piling the slash, without snow, and burn it with snow. Not too bad, but huge rings of unburned and blackened odds and ends left around each burn, also were discovered when the snow melted. And if there is too much snow the piles won't burn at all.

Okay, so can't burn with snow unless we only have a few inches. How about after rain? Yep, works if the rain doesn't completely saturate the slash-quarter inch is nice. And a wet surrounding certainly negates the fear. But how many windows of opportunity for that scenario in the dry southwest? Not enough. Add in that we only work on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Rain on Monday is gone by Friday. And then there is the wind. Anything over 10mph will fan the flames and risk the "leave" trees we are trying to save. A dilemma for sure.



So we need damp, almost windless conditions for opportune burning. Good luck in New Mexico. But they are out there. And willing helpers are a necessity too. If I have eight, or so, they can rake the piles down into ash with little left behind. We often burn 50 to eighty piles in a morning. We try to be to the cookdown stage, no flames, by 11am in case the wind gets moving. But if it is predicted over 10mph I don't light the first match unless we are very wet. The annual Monsoon is the big helper in all of this. During this very wet period (July/August) we can often burn our entire backlog of slash piles. As long as the piles are in the brown needle stage they will light even after a drenching the day before. And with everything surrounding them wet, it is a no fear burn.

Burning wet piles requires a starter. After much experimentation I came up with a mix. One third gasoline and two thirds diesel does it. Pour a cup or so into the center of the pile, stand back, throw a kitchen match. Whomp, and there she goes. I walk from pile to pile lighting them off while my crew picks up slash that got missed in the original piling. Then, after the initial burn off settles down, they push the outsides in with a rake. We all continue moving through the acre or two until the flames disappear. We put the piles "to bed" with a final rake which ensures no fuel residue is on the perimeter.

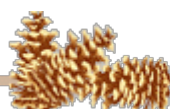


One of the best tools I came up with to aid in this program is an eight gallon sprayer mounted on my Honda. It will shoot water 20 feet or so, and helps with needle creepers. It also puts out old, nearby stumps that sometimes catch fire. I usually have a drum of water nearby to refill the sprayer if needed. We have had a couple "unintended" ignitions that needed extra water. But with all the slash in piles, any fire that gets away has very little fuel except needles-slow mover.

Regulatory folks? I need to provide the Smoke People a SMP II notification several days ahead of the planned burn. They are part of the NM Environmental Department. Once they helped me figure out how many cubic feet of pile I was burning per day, on average, the rest is just paperwork. I also need a Burn Permit from our local Fire Chief. Since I have been burning for many years, it is routine. The morning of a burn, I call the Taos County emergency dispatch number and give them the information for their records and to counter any panic calls. And last, but not least, I call the US Forest Service dispatch office in Taos, so they don't hyperreact to calls about the forest being on fire. Tedious process



true, but whatever it takes to clean my forest, it will get done. We are thinning and burning around sixty acres a year. First entry is the worst, second and third is much easier, as there is more space for burning and less "leave" trees. **Results count!**





## CONGRATULATIONS to Joe Stehling

During our New Mexico Tree Farm Committee meeting held in Corrales, NM on August 9, 2017, Joe Stehling (right) received a leadership recognition plaque for his services to the American Tree Farm System, New Mexico Tree Farm Committee (past Chairman from January 1, 2011 – December 31, 2015) and New Mexico Tree Farmers. Also pictured, Matthew Silva (left) current New Mexico Tree Farm Committee Chairman. Joe is currently the NM Tree Farm Committee Secretary. *“Joe, thank you for your dedication and continued service to the American Tree Farm System”* Matthew Silva.



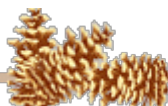
## NEW MEXICO TREE FARM COMMITTEE FALL FIELD DAY

September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017 (10:00 AM to 2:00 PM)



Our 2017 FALL TREE FARM FIELD DAY will be held at Joe and Carol Stehling’s WALDHAUS STEHLING Tree Farm high on the Ocate mesa at 10,100’ elevation, 15 miles south of Angel Fire. Come see the Burn Boss Air Curtain Incinerator in operation, see the wildlife that frequents their mountain home and the thinning that has been done on Joe and Carol’s Family Forest and on the development using grants Joe has procured.

The predominant species is comprised of Engelmann Spruce, quaking aspen, and bristlecone pine. When they purchased the property in 1998, the 20 acres were terribly overgrown with trees at a basal area of 195 square feet per acre with significant dead and down material and thick understory. Two-inch diameter trees were estimated at 225 trees per acre in Joe’s Management Plan. Joe and Carol have been working for 13 years to restore their 20 acres, to a healthy, sustainable



landscape and is their most important priority. The thinning has been mostly completed, but windthrow in winter has been a continuing problem. Limbing and treating the slash, bucking, and stacking the windthrow has hampered additional thinning required to meet Firewise standards and the cleanup needed on the on the back 10 acres.

You are cordially invited to come up to the beautiful Northern mountains and tour the Waldhaus Stehling Family Forest and enjoy a day in the high-altitude forest. Lunch will be provided. Please let us know if you will be attending to make sure we have enough food prepared for lunch. Please consider attending, you won't be disappointed. It will be an interesting and educational day.

***If you plan on attending, please RSVP by  
September 4, 2017***

**To Joe Stehling, Secretary, NM Tree Farm Committee,  
at [JoeStehling@earthlink.net](mailto:JoeStehling@earthlink.net) or 575-377-0546**

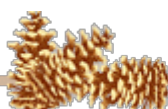
**Directions to the Waldhaus Stehling Family Forest from Angel Fire, NM:**

- Go South on Hwy 434 to Hwy 120 South (434 turns to right)
- Continue on 120 south (road turns to gravel at cattle crossing)
- Continue on 120 south for 1.5 miles
- Turn right onto road to Hidden Lake (shortly after cattle guard, mile 4.2)
- Turn right after 1.3 miles (Shield Avenue, four corners, - No sign)  
[NOTE: If you continue straight you will take the loop road around our beautiful lake winding up at the same four corner intersection.]
- Turn left after 0.1 miles (Pleasant Meadow Drive)  
[NOTE: you will pass Mertz Road on the right, be careful when going back down so you do not take this road by mistake.]
- Turn left after 0.8 miles onto Haus Lane.

## **1) NEW MEXICO PRESCRIBED FIRE TRAINING EXCHANGE**

The Southwest Program of the Forest Stewards Guild invites applications for the **Rio Trampas Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (TREX)**. Participants will serve in qualified and trainee firefighting positions on a burn team and will assist with preparing, scouting, briefing, igniting, holding, mop-up and patrol on the controlled burn. First time firefighter? No problem, we will get you the training you need. The work will take place in the Rio Trampas Watershed of northern New Mexico. The cost to participate is \$75/participant.

Applications are due August 25th but the application deadline is extended for Forest Stewards Guild Members through September 1st. For more information click [here](#). To apply click [here](#). Questions? Call Eytan Krasilovsky, Southwest Director at 505.470.0185



## 2) WHEN WAS YOUR LAST TREE FARM INSPECTION?

When was the last time your property was inspected by a Tree Farm Inspector? If it has been longer than five years you are overdue. A Tree Farm inspection should be conducted every five years. If it has been longer than five years, you are no longer a “Certified” Tree Farmer and you need to be inspected. As we work towards getting our tree farmers some form of agricultural or “Tree Farm” tax status, it is imperative that we make sure the inspections and management plans for our certified tree farmers are current, concise and correct, with addendums where needed. If you have not had your tree farm inspected in the last 5 years, please call your inspector and set up a date and a time for an inspection. All you need to do is call your Tree Farm Inspector at one of the numbers below and have the coffee pot on when your inspector gets there.

Chama District	575-588-7831	Cimarron District	575-376-2204
Socorro District	575-835-9359	Las Vegas District	505-425-7472
Capitan District	575-354-2231	Bernalillo District	505-867-2334

## 3) BUY, SELL OR TRADE

Are you looking for forestry related equipment to buy (i.e. chipper, splitter, chainsaw, etc.)? Or, do you own forestry related equipment you would like to sell or trade? Forestry related equipment only, please, no homes or land. We would like to help you make the connection with other New Mexico Tree Farmers. Provide us with a description of the equipment, price, photo and contact information and we will post it in the New Mexico Tree Farm Bulletin. If you would like us to help you make the connection, please provide information to Arnie Friedt at [arnie.friedt@state.nm.us](mailto:arnie.friedt@state.nm.us)

## 4) COMMUNITY CORNER

If your community is having a forestry related public event let us know the details and we would be delighted to promote your event in the New Mexico Tree Farm Bulletin. Give us the event details, Who, What, Where and When with contact information and we will include in our monthly bulletin. If you would like us to help you promote your event, please provide information to Arnie Friedt at [arnie.friedt@state.nm.us](mailto:arnie.friedt@state.nm.us)

## 5) E-MAIL INSTEAD OF SNAIL MAIL

Would you prefer to receive your Tree Farm Bulletin by e-mail instead of snail mail? If so, contact Doug Boykin at [doug.boykin@state.nm.us](mailto:doug.boykin@state.nm.us) and provide him with your contact information. By receiving your Tree Farm Bulletin by e-mail our operating costs are reduced. Thank you for considering this option.

## 6) COMMITTEE MEETING

All Tree Farmers are invited and encouraged to attend our 3rd New Mexico Tree Farm Committee Meeting of the year (three held annually). Please join us at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, December 13, 2017 (location to be announced). Come out and hear what other tree farmers have been up to and share your tree farm accomplishments with the group. We look forward to visiting with you. If you have any questions, please contact Arnie Friedt at [arnie.friedt@state.nm.us](mailto:arnie.friedt@state.nm.us)

