



Research Brief for Resource Managers

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Ogle Defends 1920's "Light Burning"

Ogle, C.E. 1920. Light burning. The Timberman 21(9):106-108.

In the early 20th century, there was an intense controversy over systematic "light burning" for fire control before fire suppression policies overwhelmingly prevailed. In those early management days, burning for fire control may have been counterintuitive, but in hindsight, we now know that early "light burning" arguments were often correct.

In *The Timberman*, Charles Ogle made some excellent points when he defended light burning practices. For example, he observed that fire suppression had only been the policy for a short time by 1920. Until then, ground fires had been regularly sweeping the forests clean and yet the forests were still there, properly thinned and sustainably productive. While he admitted that fire suppression had indeed stopped many destructive fires, he admonished that the fire hazard only increased as the litter and small tree thickets grew each year.

Ogle wrote that "Nature has always taken care of the proper production of new growth and as the fires ran unchecked through the forests a proper amount of thinning was affected and the remaining trees were thereby given a better chance to mature. Under the present system of fire control and the elimination of the thinning element the young growth is allowed to control the destiny of the mature timber and if present misguided attempts to preserve a stunted forest

Management Implications

- "Light Burning" advocates had to argue against popular, institutionalized assumptions about "damaging" fire.
- Ogle claimed that removing fire from the forests increase fire hazard over time.
- Homogenously stunted forests might be indicative of differing soil or climate conditions, not necessarily of repeated fire.

for posterity are not corrected, a complete destruction of our standing timber of today and the elimination of possible second growth of practical value may be the result."

Ogle was also skeptical of the idea that fire stunted timber growth, especially since the forest examples set forth were so homogenously stunted. He argued that it would be impossible for a fire to be so thorough, so this homogeneity in forests was more likely indicative of a different ecotype, possibly associated with different soils, climates or altitudes.

Finally, Ogle described how light fire protects the mature lumber from wind and fuel driven conflagration, as well as pine beetle infestation. He finished with a recommendation and description of annual or biannual burning in the Klamath.