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June 2019



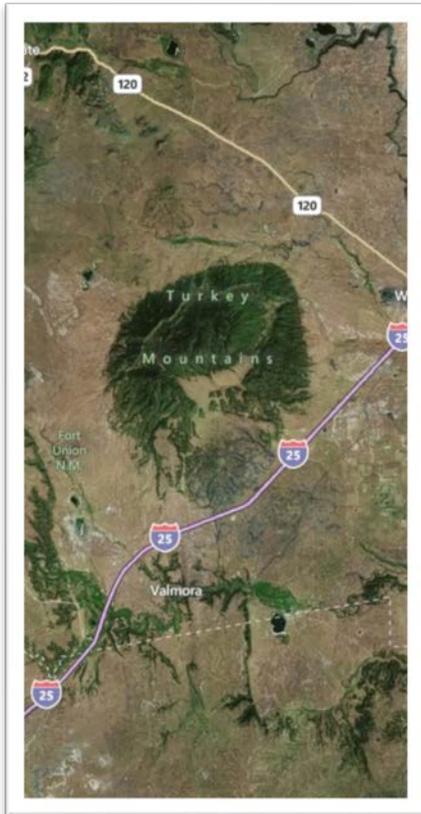
TREE FARM BULLETIN

Prescribed Fire Workshop for Private Landowners on the Ft. Union Ranch in NM

By A. Hart Alex, NM Tree Farmer

We had been burning slash piles in our forest over the last month or two with all the great recent wet weather. But I was invited to go help another forest owner burn some of his excess fuel on the weekend of May 17-19. I had always wanted to witness a prescribed burn, so I cruised over the Sangre de Cristos.

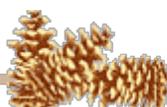
After driving across seemingly endless prairie grassland on the eastern plains of New Mexico there it was. The green mountain was a severe contrast to the short grass and rolling hills surrounding it. The mountain was as identifiable up close as it had looked from space-at around 40,000 acres. Obviously, the old volcano had pushed itself high enough (8400 ft), in its heyday, to capture passing moisture and grow trees.



It took me over half an hour from Interstate 25 at Watrous, New Mexico to enter the forest. The little blue ribbons, here and there, were my guide over the dirt roads from the Fort Union Ranch entrance. As soon as I entered the little valley, I knew I was in the right place; slash piles were scattered amid the thinning zone.

I received a phone call from Kendal Martel, my contact at The Forest Stewards Guild, wondering where I was-late. Told her I was still "on the road" just not sure where it was taking me. Then I stopped to ask a logger. Told him I was "hopelessly" lost. He laughed and said drive on another half mile. Sure enough, the road entered a large meadow filled with tents and vehicles and people wearing yellow shirts and green pants.

It had been almost fifty years since I last wore the distinctive fire-retardant clothing. That was in my firefighting days on the Southwest Forest Firefighting (SWFF) crews in the early 70s. Now instead of putting fires out, I was going to help light them. Such fun! In both scenarios the purpose was to save or "fix" the forest.



The meet and greet period ended, we made our lunches, heard the briefing and loaded onto vehicles to drive to the burn location. I was quite concerned, as the wind was increasing along with the passing of time. We always quit lighting slash piles by 11am in our forest. Not here, we were just getting started. I was to learn that some wind is necessary for the ground fires to torch off the young trees.

I thought we were going to witness a fire demonstration. No, we were there to do the job! Four squads were formed and assigned tasks. My squad was lighting fire to begin with. So, we filled the drip torches and learned how to use them. The other three squads were

involved with clearing the initial line and watching for spot fires along the lines. We were back burning from a road and using a rocky arroyo for the firebreak on windward side. There were a couple “engines” with water, and the personnel unrolled hoses in case they were needed. The communication between the squad leaders and fire boss was regular and efficient as the burning began and we moved through the forest. At the beginning I was not in a position to watch fire as I was too busy lighting. But when our squad was replaced, and we were put on the fire perimeter I saw what was happening within.



A. Hart Alex



This was not a burn of slash, but simply normal forest residue/excess fuel. Pine needles were sufficient to set off shorter trees with the wind. They “torched” with flames rising five to 15 feet, at times. Here and there fallen snags caused more intense fire. Watching flames crawl up the big ponderosa pine stems was a wonder. Our primary job, that first day, was to provide a “black” line which would increase the fire line along the road on the downwind side of the 150 acres they planned to burn. The professionals, running the show, had obviously been doing this for a long time considering their primary job was to burn forest? The Gravitas Peak folks were great teachers. They carefully outlined what we were doing, how and when, and why while

answering all questions. Was I impressed? I guess so. Besides the dozen or so forest landowners, we had staff from the Forest Stewards Guild, The Nature Conservancy and Western Lands Alliance filling the ranks.

Slackers need not apply. It was a pedal to the metal effort, as needed, from a slew of volunteers and professionals. Several of the ranchers owned land adjacent; not as big as the Fort Union Ranch-94,000 acres-but still impressive. When the Mora Land Grant (827,000 acres) was carved up in the late 1800s, some impressive ranches were established, and they have stood the test of time. We had a variety of “Engine” crews available to assist if fire became uncontrolled but, thankfully, they were not needed.



My partners for the drip torch effort, on the second day, were Gabriel and Kendal from the Forest Stewards Guild. When we weren't lighting fire, we discussed resizing this training exercise for the smaller landowners of northern New Mexico. I thought if they could provide a five or ten acre burn training exercise, we might be able to get more landowners on board to use this important forest management tool to "return fire to the forest" in a meaningful way. It will be necessary to introduce prescribed burning to thousands of landowners across New Mexico. The Forest Stewards Guild, The Nature Conservancy, and The Rio Grande Watershed folks have the know-how, funds and willingness to assist along with the NM Prescribed Fire Council.



I was unable to attend the third day of this valuable training. It was my turn to irrigate our pastures and the mayordomo did not want to skip me and give me the water later. Besides, I thought a day of rest was warranted after my two long days in the forest. It was a wonderful experience to work on the Fort Union Ranch alongside so many people who obviously love their work while they are improving the forest by reintroducing fire.

American Forest Foundation
<https://www.americanforests.org>
The Forest Stewards Guild
<https://foreststewardsguild.org>



Fire Learning Network

<https://www.conservationgateway.org/ConservationPractices/FireLandscapes/FireLearningNetwork/Pages/fire-learning-network.aspx>

Fort Union https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fort_Union_National_Monument

Gravitas Peak Wildland Fire Module <https://www.gpwfm.org/what-we-do>

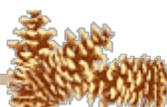
Western Landowners Alliance <https://westernlandowners.org>

NM Prescribed Fire Council <https://nmxfire.nmsu.edu/about.html>

The Nature Conservancy <https://www.nature.org/en-us/>

Fire Adapted NM <https://facnm.org>

A. Hart Alex and his wife Utilia are forest land owners and New Mexico Tree Farmers in the upper Peñasco Valley of Taos County. One of their primary forest management objectives, over the decades, while "restoring" the forest has been to eliminate the excess fuel and restart the vegetation as is shown in this recent photo of their ponderosa pine forest.



1) COMMITTEE MEETING

All Tree Farmers are invited and encouraged to attend our 2nd New Mexico Tree Farm Committee Meeting of the year (three held annually). Please join us at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, August 14th, 2019 at the New Mexico Department of Game and Fish office located at 7816 Alamo Road. NW, Albuquerque, NM 87120. 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

2) 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

FOR SALE: Morbark Model 10, only has 774 hours on it, 56 hp John Deere diesel engine and recently rebuilt twin disc clutch. Good condition, very dependable and easy to maintain machine. \$7,500... reduced from \$8,000. Contact JJ or Kim Duckett, 575-987-2561 or email mountain@dellcity.com --- Located in Timberon, NM.



3) 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

4) 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 Arnie Friedt at arnie.friedt@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.

