

# Utah Forest News

## Utah Forest Landowner Education Program Newsletter

Volume 4 Number 3

Summer 2000

### You Can Save Your Home from a Wildfire

A surprising insight has risen from the ashes of the recent wildfire in Los Alamos: a few hours of light duty yard-work, if done in advance of the fire, would likely have saved most of the 200 homes that burned.

News images of Los Alamos led many to believe that the houses stood in the way of a raging crown fire, with the tree tops exploding one after another and the flames leaping hundreds of feet towards the sky in a moving, raging inferno. It appeared that homeowners were completely powerless to save their homes.

A closer look at those burned neighborhoods reveals many green and unburned tree tops. This is striking evidence that clearly shows that the fire in the community was actually a surface fire, burning in the dead pine needles and sticks that had built up over time on the forest floor.

These findings are shocking to homeowners and veteran firefighters. What this means to homeowners is they need not be completely dependent upon an agency fire truck to save their homes. In fact, in a

fire event like Los Alamos, agency equipment is soon overwhelmed, as the advancing front of a fire can be hundreds of yards wide and ignite several homes simultaneously.



*This photo was taken from the edge of the Los Alamos community, looking into the forest after the fire. Notice that the fire burned the material on the ground, including the woodpile in the foreground, but the needles on the trees remained unburned.*

Many of Utah's smaller communities and rural developments have been built in forests, woodlands and rangelands that have not seen fire in over one hundred years. The logical interpretation of this lack of fire is that the surrounding countryside is unlikely to burn. As the grass, brush, and trees continue to grow, however, fuels build up, and so does the corresponding fire danger.

Having wildland fires is not a choice that anyone gets to make. As currently evidenced throughout Utah, wildland fires can and will continue to burn, and in some cases they will take homes with them. Fire plays a vital role in the wildlands of Utah. Even if we could physically and economically remove fire from our landscape we probably wouldn't want to; because fire can do good things for Utah's forests and rangelands.

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We can choose to make our homes more resistant to wildfire. There are a few specific steps that will greatly increase the odds that your home will withstand the inevitable fire event.

Removing dead leaves, pine needles, and sticks that fall on and directly around your house is a big step toward reducing the ignitability of your home. However, for this to be effective it must be done on a regular basis, depending on the type and amount of vegetation surrounding your home. See accompanying list for other firewise practices.

*by Darren McAvoy – Based on the research and findings of Jack D. Cohen, Research Physical Scientist, Fire Sciences Laboratory, USDA Forest Service.*



## Steps for Saving Your Home or Cabin in the Woods.

1. Clean up! Collect and remove dead vegetation such as leaves, needles, and sticks that accumulate on or within a minimum distance of 30 feet from your home.
2. Move firewood, construction materials, and other flammables at least 30 feet away from your home, especially during the summer.
3. Enclose the eaves of your home with soffits and screen all vents and other openings. This will keep out the blowing embers that can start fires in your attic space.
4. Prevent flames from directly hitting your home by appropriately pruning or cutting highly flammable trees and bushes. Note that evergreens and scrub oak tend to be highly flammable, while aspen and broad-leafed ornamentals tend to be less flammable.
5. For more information on the web, see <http://www.firewise.org>, or contact Darren McAvoy at Utah State University Forestry Extension at 435-797-0560.

## Death Tax Repeal on Way to Senate

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed a standalone bill that repeals the Death Tax, which if made into law, would phase out federal estate taxes over the next ten years. The “Death Tax” includes the federal estate, gift, and generation skipping transfer taxes that restrict people’s ability to transfer property and money at death.

Many families in Utah and other states have been unable to afford their federal estate taxes when passing forestland on from one generation to the next. This forces some families to subdivide their land or harvest their timber to pay the taxes. Some landowners have had to give up their property to avoid bankruptcy.

## Landowner Profile: Richard Pratt

Richard (Dick) Pratt is a successful businessman and investor. His years of experience as a university professor in business management, a business owner, and an investment banker, have given him the skills to recognize wise investments and manage them well. In the early 90's Dick and his business partner, Larry Uhl, decided to try their hand at investing in timber property, not only for the possible financial returns, but also for the value of "just knowing that you have it" and "to hold and preserve the land."

Soon they purchased their first piece of forestland, in the mountains east of Fairview, near Electric Lake.

Although much of the property was steep, it had beautiful stands of timber and views of the surrounding lakes and mountains. Anxious to get started with management, they signed a two year contract with a timber broker to have a portion of the timber harvested.

For the first year and a half Dick and Larry could see that the logger was doing excellent work. He was careful not to tear up the soil or damage the trees that were intended to be left standing (leave trees). By using a highlead yarding system, which lifts the logs via a suspended cable, he was able to work on the steep slopes without excessive soil disturbance.

As the end of the contract approached, however, the timber broker fired the logger that seemed to be doing so well, and brought a different logging crew onto the property. Soon they were using tractors on those same steep slopes, cutting multiple deep trails into the

hillside, damaging the leave trees, and leaving heavy concentrations of slash.

The contract the partners signed with the timber broker was prepared by the timber broker, and left them little means to halt the destruction. They had to

resort to legal action to stop the damage. Unfortunately, by that time most of the property had been logged, leaving them with a high-graded stand of timber, excessive slash accumulation, and tremendous soil erosion potential.

Although Dick feels sickened at the thought of the mistreatment of his forestland, he con-

siders himself lucky to have done well on the financial aspect of the timber sale. Their market timing was impeccable as the early 90's real estate prices were still fairly low, and timber value was at an all-time-high. Additionally, he says the best thing he did was requiring payment in advance for the logs to be removed. Without this stipulation, he thinks he may have also taken a tremendous financial loss.

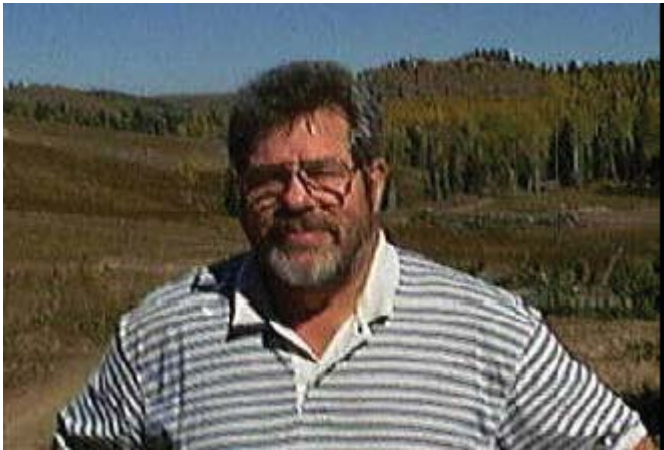
Dick says that the "problem with our approach was that we had no knowledgeable person to help us out, and that hurt us." Consequently, they went looking for someone with the "education, experience, and character" to help them with their management decisions and goals. Their search led them to Merlin Esplin, of Triangle E Natural Resource Consulting. According to Dick, Merlin "gives you both sides before making a recommendation." With Merlin's help, they were able to make more informed management decisions and



*The horizontal scars on this hillside are unnecessary; too many skid trails, too close together.*

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have a better feel for the possible outcomes of each choice. Since then, they have seen over 15,000 trees planted on the property under Merlin's direction.



*Landowner Dick Pratt*

All the wiser from their experience, and with an advisor from the beginning this time, Dick and Larry purchased another piece of forestland in the mountains east of Fairview. They decided on contracting with an operator that used a helicopter to lift the logs from the woods to the landing. Helicopter logging, although expensive compared to more traditional methods, eliminates the need for skid trails and can be the best choice when operating on extremely steep slopes. Additionally, the satisfaction that they have gotten from conducting a visually pleasing timbersale is evident from the sound of their voices when they point out that from the Fairview Canyon Road, the stand appears to have never been logged.

*by Darren McAvoy – This Landowner Profile originally suggested by Lisa Dennis-Perez*

### **Tips from Dick Pratt:**

- 1. Be careful who you deal with.**
- 2. See samples of their work.**
- 3. Get experienced help before you begin management activities.**



### **Maximum Slopes for Safe and Productive Tractor Skidding**

The maximum slope angle for skidding logs with a bulldozer is generally between 50 and 60 percent, 30 percent for rubber-tired skidders. Avoid building skid trails across hills when operating on steep slopes; they are ugly, cause erosion, and excludes land from timber production.

*Source: "Logging Practices: Principles of Timber Harvesting Systems" by Steve Conway*

## EPA Retreats on Forestry Regulation, Temporarily

According to the July 2000 National Woodlands Magazine, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has dropped its recent attempt to include forestry activities within its regulatory framework. The proposed changes could have resulted in the need for private forest landowners to obtain a federal permit for road building, timber harvesting, slash burning, tree planting, or a number of other standard forestry practices. The withdrawal of the proposal is likely to be temporary, as the agency indicated it may reintroduce the proposal in the future.

Much of the public outcry over the changes came from private landowners and states that testified they were already taking sufficient steps to address forestry impacts on water quality. Many believe that federal involvement would interfere with current state efforts.

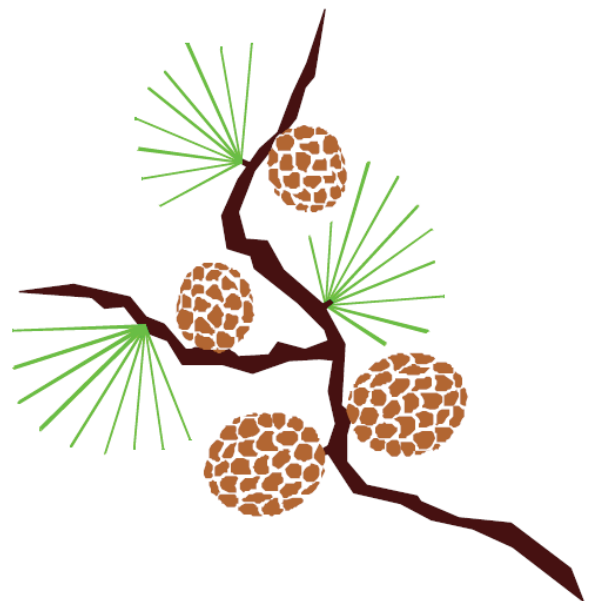
Part of the message the EPA has delivered through its proposal is that “States must be more aware of the impacts of forestry on the environment,” according to Ron Gropp, Stewardship Coordinator for the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands. Currently, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands is working with the Utah Forest Landowner Education Program to produce an easy-to-read interpretation of Utah’s recently developed Forest Water Quality Guidelines.

The EPA currently classifies forestry activities as nonpoint sources of pollution, meaning they do not originate from a definable point such as a drain pipe. Most point sources of water pollution are regulated by the EPA, and used in their calculations of acceptable levels of sediment and discharge into a stream or river, called Total Maximum Daily Loads or TMDL’s.

## Fire Restrictions

As of mid-June, Stage I fire restrictions have been in place for all private, state, and federal lands in Utah. Lands located in incorporated cities and towns are not affected by the restriction. The fire restriction prohibits open fires of any kind except campfires in developed campgrounds and facilities: smoking, except in vehicles, boats, developed recreation sites, residences or in an area at least three feet in diameter that is cleared of all flammable materials; and fireworks, tracer ammunition or other pyrotechnic devices.

Jeannette Hartog, Cooperative Fire Prevention Officer with the USDA Forest Service, said that the current severity of fire danger, coupled with the lack of available firefighting resources, is creating extreme fire conditions. Hartog encourages folks to be extra careful to prevent unwanted fires. State and federal agencies are considering Stage II fire restrictions, which restrict motorized equipment and vehicle operation in the woods between 1:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m.



## What is Your Timber Worth?

Landowners typically receive differing prices for their timber. That price varies according to the size, quantity, and quality of the wood removed, the harvesting methods and equipment used, and the hauling distance to the mill. The following figure is a rough estimate of stumpage values in Utah which are based on the **average** high-bids received in Forest Service tractor-logged timber sales for all species of trees and all zones of Utah in 1999.

**\$191.50/mbf**

**(thousand board feet)**

*Stumpage is the value of uncut timber, or roughly the value of logs delivered to the mill minus logging and hauling costs. Remember that this number is based on averages, and your stumpage value may be higher or lower. A timber appraisal conducted by a professional forester is required to determine an accurate value for your timber.*

**So what does this mean to you?** Some rough conversions:

Consider that a typical truckload of logs scales (measures) out to about 4 thousand board feet.  
 $4 \text{ mbf/truckload} \times \$191.50/\text{mbf} = \mathbf{\$764.00 \text{ per truckload}}$  to you.

If you are considering selling your logs by weight, you might consider that the same typical truckload of 4 mbf weighs about 25 tons (not including the truck).  $\$764.00 \text{ per truckload} \div 25 \text{ tons/truckload} = \mathbf{\$30.56/\text{ton}}$  to you.

Another way of looking at it is if you had 40 acres of typical timber land that you wanted logged, it might typically have 10 mbf per acre, if you remove all of the merchantable timber (not recommended) you get:  $40 \text{ acres} \times 10 \text{ mbf/acre} = 400 \text{ mbf} \times \$191.50/\text{mbf} = \mathbf{\$76,600}$ .

“In my experience with Utah’s timber market, dead spruce has been worth as much as, or more than, live spruce”

Merling Esplin, Triangle E Natural Resource Consulting.

*Much concern has been expressed lately over of the ongoing spruce beetle outbreak in Utah. Look for more information about this in upcoming issues of the Utah Forest News.*

## Terms to Know:

**Highlead logging system:** A system of winches and cables suspended from a tower used to lift logs uphill to a landing.

**Landing:** A flat area accessed by a road, where logs are collected, sorted, and loaded onto log trucks.

**Slash:** The debris remaining after logging: the tree tops and branches, logs that are broken, rotten, or too small to haul to the mill.

**Timber Broker:** A person that sets up contracts between landowners, loggers, and sawmills. May or may not have forestry education.

**Professional Forester:** Someone who has been trained through an accredited forestry education program and has knowledge and experience in ecology, forest science, forestry practices.

**Helicopter Logging:** Using a helicopter to lift logs from the stump to the landing.

## Upcoming Events

### **Forest Taxation and Estate Planning Workshop:**

Three tax specialists from the USDA Forest Service will present the basics of forest taxation and estate planning. Landowners, foresters, and accountants are encouraged to attend.

January 24 & 25, 2001.  
Comfort Suites, Ogden, Utah.

*For more information call Ron Gropp at the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire, and State Lands at 801-538-5457, or Darren McAvoy at the Utah Forest Landowner Education Program at 435-797-0560*

### **Southern Utah Aspen Workshop:**

Southern Utah ranchers have expressed concern over the disappearance of quaking aspen on their land, and scientists from the USDA Forest Service have documented the decline of aspen in Utah and across the West.

In response to these developments Chad Reid, Utah State University Agricultural Extension Agen for Iron County, and Clint Reese of the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands are planning a workshop for early this fall in the Cedar City area. Speakers will include scientists from the USDA Forest Service and Utah State University.

Dates and times to be announced.

*For more information contact Chad Reid at 435-586-8132.*

## Classifieds

Do you have forest resources you are looking to sell? Are there specific timber resources you are looking to buy? Do you offer services useful to forest landowners? This is the place to advertise your needs! Advertisement is free. If you would like to place an ad, call Darren McAvoy at 435-797-0560 or e-mail darrenm@cnr.usu.edu.

**Utah Forest Products, Inc.** - Looking for saw logs and offering competitive bids on standing timber. All species considered. Complete management proposals offered using best management practices. Contact John Schmidt, Forester, at 435-865-9438 or at our mill in Escalante, 435-826-4521. Please keep Utah forests working for Utah!

### **Triangle E Natural Resource Consulting /**

**Merlin Esplin** - Providing timber inventories and cruising, land and timber management prescriptions, timber marking, road layout, boundary identification and marking, timber sale administration, and other natural resource analysis and implementation services. Call 435-648-2109, fax 435-648-2509, or contact us at P.O. Box 48, Orderville, UT 84758

*This classified section is intended as a service for forest landowners. Listing of these services, companies, and individuals here in no way implies endorsement by Utah State University Extension. We suggest that you use the same precautions you would use in the purchase or sale of any goods and services, including asking for and checking references and using a written agreement to clarify the obligations and responsibilities involved in a sale or service contract.*



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### For More Information:

Regarding any of the information presented in this newsletter, please call Darren McAvoy at Utah State University at 435-797-0560.

State of Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands (FF&SL) service foresters for your area can be contacted by calling 801-538-5555.

Ideas and written contributions to this newsletter are encouraged. Send your comments to the return address below or call 435-797-0560.

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