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Fact Sheet

After the Fire

When are reseeding and erosion control measures necessary?

Wildfires are destructive to wildlife habitat and human infrastructure, not to mention dangerous to life and well-being. The large-scale changes to the landscape after a major wildfire can instill a desire for immediate action to return the landscape to what we think of as “normal”. However, landscapes in the West are adapted to frequent fires and have the ability to quickly heal the damage.

Unless your property has one of the following exceptions, the general recommendation for reseeding and erosion control is to **WAIT AND SEE**.

Exceptions and possible treatment:

- Disturbed soils from firelines or other heavy equipment work – reseeding.
- Extremely steep slopes that have human infrastructure or homes downhill – erosion control products such as straw bales or wattles, silt fence, etc.; reseeding possible but tricky.
- Previously weed-infested areas, especially if only lightly burned – reseeding and weed control.
- Extremely hot fires that change the soil structure so that it repels rather than absorbs water (hydrophobic) – no treatment. (Many of the areas within the Sleepy Hollow Fire may not have burned hot enough to create these conditions.)

Wait and see: Many of the grasses, wildflowers, shrubs and trees in the burned areas will resprout on their own. You may already notice some grasses and perennials popping up, and that process will continue. Reseeding in most areas will not only increase plant competition, but may introduce species not native or appropriate to the area, and the expensive seed may be eaten by wildlife whose normal food has been consumed by the fire. Adding chopped straw will inhibit natural plant regeneration. Perennial native bunchgrasses and woody shrubs will regenerate much more quickly than seeds that must have time and moisture to become established.

Occasionally reseeding or planting bare-root shrubs and trees may be desired, after the first or second growing season. The Cascadia Conservation District staff can help cooperators determine the appropriate species to plant, and Cascadia’s Annual Plant Sale is a good source for native plants and seed. Contact us at (509) 436-1601 for more information.

THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS AT OKANOGAN CONSERVATION DISTRICT FOR CREATING AND SHARING THIS RESOURCE.

