

# The Era of Megafires

*A multi-media, educational presentation.*

Megafires are wildfires over 100,000 acres. The destruction caused by Megafires is a serious and growing issue in the Northwestern United States. Our communities, homes, businesses and our very way of life are threatened. If we are going to make effective progress towards increasing fire resiliency, we must increase awareness and stimulate conversation about this important issue across all levels of society. Through education, Dr. Paul Hessburg firmly believes we can change the way we receive fire and smoke.

Dr. Paul Hessburg is a Research Ecologist with the Pacific Northwest Research Station, U.S. Forest Service.



*Paul F. Hessburg, Sr.  
Research Landscape Ecologist  
Pacific Northwest Research Station,  
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He has been studying historical & modern era forests of the Inland West for the last 32 years, publishing extensively in leading national & international journals. His work documents large changes in forest conditions and how these changes, along with climate change, have set the stage for large & severe wildfires. Dr. Hessburg and North 40 Productions have developed a 70-90 minute educational lecture, with HD video and animation to back up his years of research, “The Era of Megafires.” This well done presentation is an outgrowth of his research and his concerns for the future of our forests and our way of life. The presented material comes in the form of fast-moving, short, topic-based talks interspersed with compelling video vignettes and features the work of wildfire photographer, John Marshall.

In 1910 the United States experienced a fire that claimed over three million acres. Multiple lives were lost and entire communities destroyed. The U.S. Forest Service began taking on a major role in fire suppression. By the early 1950s they had developed a system to control wildfire. Dr. Hessburg explained that “control” came at a cost and now we’re paying for it. Although we’re paying over \$2 billion in fire suppression, the cost to businesses, communities, home owners, and our way of life is in excess of \$50 billion.

Nature has always dealt with wildfire and it was controlled by the natural terrain of the land. Species of vegetation on the north-side of a mountain would burn differently than a low lying valley area or a high timber area. Small patch-works of fires in different areas would become fire breaks during the next fire season. The photography of John Marshall showed many examples of the landscape of the early 1900s compared to the same view of the forest as it is today. The photography visualized the stark contrast of the forests as they had been at the turn of the 20th century and as they are today, overly dense, fuel laden, and insect/disease prone. These “patchwork fires” have been contained and we no longer have the natural firebreaks of the past. The hot dry temperatures and gusting and powerful winds associated with climate change have been producing drier conditions leading to a large number of fires that burn hot and furiously because they have so much built up fuel. In many cases hundreds of thousands of acres at a time. Although this paints a pretty dire picture of the future, there are things we can do to help make necessary changes.

So what is the answer? Forest management must make a sharp revision through more prescribed burns, harvesting areas that are permitted, and homeowners taking responsibility for protecting their own property.



*The Bing Crosby Theater in Spokane, Washington was the venue for the “Era of Megafire” presentation by Dr. Hessburg on May 4<sup>th</sup>. The Spokane event was sponsored by Vaagen Bros. Lumber, Inc.*



*John Marshall has a M.S. in wildlife resources from the University of Idaho. In addition to his 20-year photographic study of landscape recovery after wildfire, he is working with the U.S. Forest Service to compare historic photographs with modern retakes and show how forests have dramatically changed over many decades. Credit John Marshall / U.S. Forest Service*

**The Era of Megafires continued from page 8**

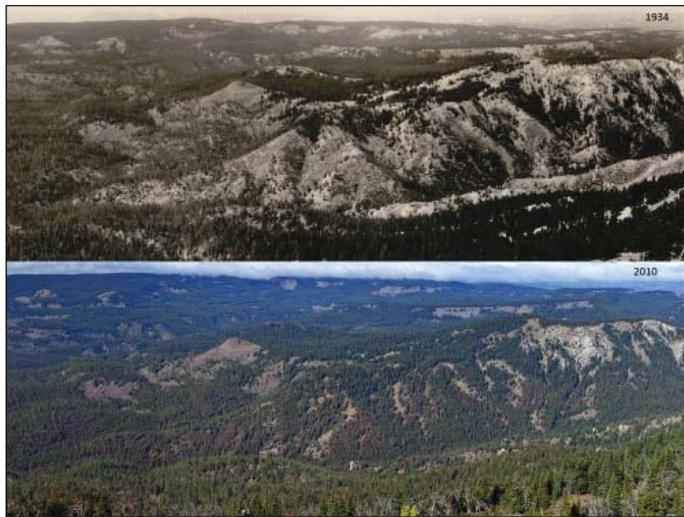
We can use mechanical thinning in areas that we are permitted to manage. These areas are often in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) with existing road systems and prior management activities. There are also many areas of the foothills that have road systems and past management that can be thinned as well. These necessary restoration treatments can get the forests back into a condition to handle fire in a beneficial way, either by natural occurring fire or prescribed burning.

Using collaboration, we can get the necessary support from our local communities and conservation groups to provide these treatments. This was highlighted in the film by Mike Petersen of the Lands Council, a conservation group based in Spokane. They are proponents of the benefits of coming together to talk about the combined interests in the forests. What a concept, the Forest Industry and the Environmental Community coming together to focus on their collective interests, healthy forests.

Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC), get together monthly to make sure the projects on the ground are meeting ecological,



*Smoke from Round Mountain Fire. Lake Wenatchee in background. Dirtyface Peak on right.*  
Credit John Marshall / U.S. Forest Service



*Mission Peak in north-central Washington's Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. In historic times, these woods would experience regular low-intensity burns. As the ironic result of effective firefighting, the dry-side forests are now primed for severe wildfires.*  
Credit John Marshall / U.S. Forest Service

economic, and social needs. The group is working with local land managers to do more prescribed burning while getting public input at the same time. Combining the benefits of restoration treatments with prescribed fire, we get a forest condition much like what has been natural for hundreds of years. On top of that, we can use the by-products of these treatments to supply mills. This type of cooperation is good for the forests, mills, and the communities. It's something that can breathe economic and social life back into these towns all while benefiting the forests.

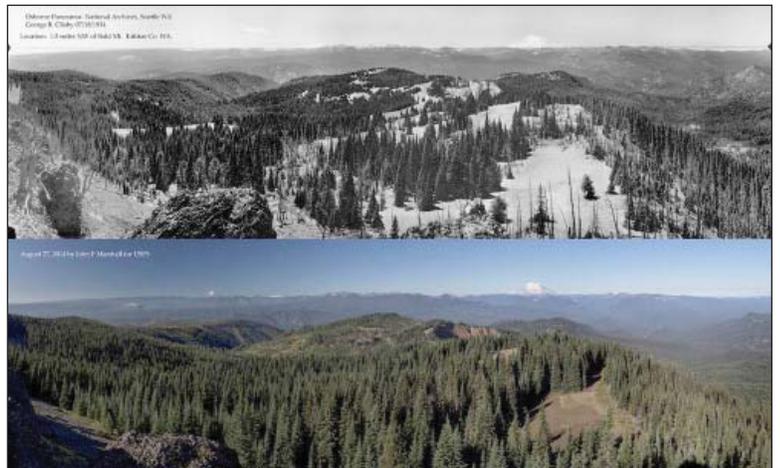
However, in order to have such a conversation, the historical, economical and scientific background of wildfire mitigation in the U.S. is key. For example, many don't know that logging can actually help maintain a forest. The general population has heard of the Sierra Club battles and media campaigns against logging, so it's really important for people to understand more of the science. "Era of Megafires" seeks to mediate this by utilizing a multimedia approach that intersperses videos, infographics and photography throughout Hessburg's commentary.

The support for tactics such as prescribed burning is not one group's responsibility. Dr. Hessburg appeals for agencies and the public

to engage in conversation and ultimately work together in advocating for the use of prescribed burning. It is still too early to gauge the overall impact of this presentation in encouraging such partnerships, but the multimedia presentation, "Era of Megafires" shows how necessary accessibility to information is to making environmental decisions that affect us all.

For upcoming tour dates and locations go to <http://www.north40productions.com/wildfire/>.

- May 15 - McCall, ID
- May 16 - Boise, ID
- May 17 - Twin Falls, ID
- May 18 - Pocatello, ID
- May 22 - Stevenson, WA
- May 23 - Underwood, WA
- May 24 - Hood River, OR
- May 25 - Enterprise, OR
- June 19 - Entiat, WA
- June 20 - Wenatchee, WA
- June 21 - Wenatchee, WA
- June 22 - Stehekin, WA
- June 26 - Jackson Hole, WY
- June 29 - Yakima, WA
- July 10 - Cranbrook, BC
- July 14 - Holden Village, WA



*Northwest of Bald Mountain in Kittitas County, Washington*  
Credit John Marshall / U.S. Forest Service