



TREMBLINGS

NEWSLETTER & BULLETIN BOARD

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“...partnering to preserve and restore healthy aspen ecosystems in the West.”

The WAA is a user-driven organization. *Tremblings* will attempt to capture the greater aspen user group's wants and needs. Please send suggestions, contributions, recent publications, and commentary to Paul Rogers (Hp.rogers@usu.edu).

WAA HAPPENINGS

US Forest Service Webinar—A February 23 “virtual” conference addressing current aspen situations and management options around the West was hosted by the USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station. An estimated 400+ participants viewed real-time presentations, asked questions via phone link-up, and participated in a summary discussion of site-specific aspen conditions. Contact Robert Campbell, Fishlake NF, for further information.

Partners Meeting—In late February WAA partners met in Salt Lake City to discuss the progress, status, and future direction of the organization. Participants from the BLM, USFS Regions 2, 3, and 4; USFS Research; Utah State University; and the State of Utah addressed the central mission and future funding. Exciting developments include near completion of a Participating Agreement between all of the Interior West USFS Regions and Utah State University, plus establishment of a cooperative relationship with the BLM. See Paul Rogers for detailed notes of the meeting.

Steering Committee—A realignment and meeting of the WAA Steering Committee (see website, Contacts) took place in Logan, UT and via phone April 7-8 to begin acting on the direction given at the *Partners Meeting*. Please welcome Bobette Jones, Lassen NF, and Aaron Wilkerson, BLM Utah State Office, to the Steering Committee. The key roles of this group will be to prioritize and implement the WAA's activities, perform outreach, and assess and shore up the organizational structure. Dale Bartos or Paul Rogers are the prime contacts for the Steering Committee.



An August 2009 northern Arizona field trip addressed impacts of intensive elk use on the Coconino National Forest (Photo: Paul Rogers).

UPCOMING EVENTS

Science Advisory Panel—On May 11-12 the WAA SAP will meet for the first time. The group consists of agency and university scientists from around the region and representing a variety of disciplines. The SAP will perform scientific oversight and make recommendations for scientific needs and future directions of the WAA. We are confident that lively debate will spawn critical basic and applied research questions for sustainable land management. The meeting will be followed by a ½-day field trip and free-form discussion. Please give us your input on needed research/monitoring at your locale. Samuel St. Clair is the SAP chairman.

Summer Field Trips—Please note that one of the prime services of the WAA has been conducting multi-party field trips around the western states. Contact us to schedule a field trip in your area.

The Utah Forest Restoration Working Group is planning a June field trip (date to be determined) in central/southern Utah to assess potential demonstration sites for aspen restoration. The



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UFRWG is composed of a wide mix of agency, NGO, university, and private interests who have been working for just over one year on a consensus-driven plan for aspen management statewide. Their "Guidelines for Aspen Restoration" are due out summer 2010. Karen DiBari, National Forest Foundation, is facilitating this project.

PRIFOR Conference—The *Northern Primeval Forest: Ecology, Conservation and Management* conference will take place in Sundsvall, Sweden August 9-13. In addition to talks addressing both *Populus tremula* and *P. tremuloides*, there will be wide-ranging presentations on management of northern latitude forests. See their website for details: <http://www.prifor2010.org/index.html>

COMMENTARY

A West-wide Consortium to Promote Aspen Landscapes and Healthy Watersheds

Dale Bartos is a Research Ecologist for the U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Logan, Utah. The views expressed here are the author's and not necessarily those of the Western Aspen Alliance.



In the western U.S., aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) are most abundant in Colorado and Utah. In most of its western range, aspen are a mid-elevation shade-intolerant species that is a relatively minor component of more widespread conifer forests.

Quaking aspen are a key element in the pursuit of diverse and sustainable western forested ecosystems. Intact aspen communities provide multiple values including: important water yields, rich biodiversity, luxuriant undergrowth, excellent watershed protection, favored wildlife habitat for big-game and nongame species,

valuable livestock forage, and wood fiber production. Therefore, the 'aspen as a keystone species' concept is an important integrator of a multitude of values. Thus, the health of the landscape can be judged in part by how aspen systems are functioning.

Succession is due to replacement of aspen by more shade tolerant conifers. Historically, this process was disrupted by periodic disturbances such as fire that reset the system to an earlier stage. Aspen generally sprout profusely (up to 200,000 stems per acre) from a shallow root system following disturbance. Lack of disturbance on a regular basis has resulted in the "decline" of aspen in many areas of the West. This decline of aspen has been a major concern of land managers for many decades.

The overall goal of the Western Aspen Alliance (WAA) is to facilitate effective and appropriate management of aspen ecosystems in the western U.S. through coordinated scientific efforts and shared information. Currently there is a need to increase involvement in the WAA and refine its objectives, while addressing the key issues of changing aspen landscapes. We anticipate that the primary tools to be identified for use with end users need to include: 1) **Communication Tools** - an expertise network and technology transfer media, including workshops/conferences, and publications; 2) **Scientific Assessments** - extent of Sudden Aspen Decline (SAD) and historic aspen coverage, assess aspen stand structure as related to aspen resiliency, and accurately map seral/stable aspen stands and genetic make-up of stands; 3) **Scientist/Manager Partnerships** - collaboration to address research and communication gaps; 4) **Social Science Exchange** - explore economic contributions and potential, assess values for different user groups, including Native Americans, of aspen landscapes.

An end product of the WAA's efforts would be the enhanced sustainability and resiliency of our



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forested lands in the western U.S., especially where aspen are an integral component of the system. More immediate results include: 1) prioritization of research needed to assess threats to sustainability and resilience of western aspen ecosystems; 2) development of interactive forums and media to help transfer scientific findings to users in part by strengthening the WAA website; and 3) the use of young, vigorously growing aspen (early seral stages) as buffers around dwellings to provide added protection from fires in the wildland/urban interface and in conifer forested landscapes to reduce the potential for larger, damaging wildfires.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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