



Research Brief for Resource Managers

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Early “Light Burning” Opposition

MacDaniels, E. H. 1924. National forest jungles: the theory of “light burning” in yellow pine is disproved. The Timberman 25(3) 50-51.

As Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor in 1924, E. H. MacDaniels argued that the “Brushy Hell” of shrublands must be protected for the benefit of future timberland succession, “so leave them alone!” Acknowledging that chaparral “jungles” were not so nice, he lectured that they were all unnatural, fire ruined lands that needed fire protection. He explained that the introduction of repeated “light burning” by Indians and careless white settlers created California’s shrublands, and because he believed the shrublands functioned as shady, protected nurseries for valuable young timber, he also admonished his readers against “grazing, good hunting, or what not; in favor of waiting for good timber to grow.”

As evidence against light burning, he suggested that “light burners” already had their century to prove their point and failed, unable to adequately justify light burning to the Forest Service. He claimed that light burning scarred growing timber, slowed tree growth and attracted bark beetles. Pitchy scars were thought to make the trees more flammable in subsequent fires. And further, the cost of controlled burning was deemed unprofitable as a fire management tool. MacDaniels calculated that the pejoratively nicknamed “Siskiyou National Brush Patch” could grow 30 billion feet of good saw logs if it was protected from fire instead of the meager 20,000 feet per acre that were actually there. According

Management Implications

- In 1924, it was commonly imagined that the repeated fires of the native Americans and early settler had ruined magnificently timbered forests, transforming them into shrublands like chaparral.
- MacDaniels argued that shrublands should be given protection from burning, grazing, and hunting because they were a successional stage toward reforestation.
- He contended that “light burning” advocates had had a century to prove their point and failed. With so much apparent evidence against burning, he rationalized their inability to admit defeat with “prejudice” against government managed, forest protection and a pioneering lifestyle.

to MacDaniels, all these observations made the “moral: prevent forest fires—it pays.”

He was not surprised that common sense fire suppression policies were met with so much resistance: “It would be extraordinary if all the details of the Forest Service were to meet with everyone’s approval. Still, it is based on a good deal more study than anyone else has been able to give it, and if its premises are wrong no one has been able to prove it yet.”