

Forests Along the Oregon Trail: How They've Changed



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For me, the story of the Oregon Trail represent the saga of the human spirit. Tens of thousands of families took enormous risks to cross an unknown land. A trek that many were not adequately prepared to make.



Greatest Human Migration

- 2000 mile journey
- 1811-1840 passable only by foot or horseback
- 1836 first wagon train to Fort Hall
- 1836 Missionaries (Spaldings & Whitmans)
- 1841 first wagon trains through Oregon & use until the 1890s
- 1842-1869 some 500,000 emigrants traveled over all the western trails.



Greatest Human Migration

- Formidable obstacles & dangers
- Sickness & disease
- Many were ill-prepared for the journey
- No guarantees



*113 Augt. 22 Decamped at 9. o'clock a.m a cold frosty morning and traveled 14 miles..... 5 miles up a steep hill very rough over a dividing ridge and down a pretty vale to another steep & rough hill, descending a **very steep** & stoney hill to the grand round.... Saw 27 dead cattle 4 graves.” - John Fothergill 1853*

The Blue Mountains

"The Blue Mountains were still the principal physical obstacle to overland settlement of the Pacific Northwest long after a wagon route had been blazed across them. They greatly impressed those who took the trail to Oregon, but only partly because of the hardship they represented. They were the first mountains, with the first real forest, that these people encountered."

- John Evans
Powerful Rocky



Grande Ronde Valley



“Came in sight of the Grand Round... It is certainly one of the loveliest valleys the eye ever rested upon, stretching far and wide, with the most luxuriant grass, the soil being of the richest kind. A stream passes through the valley, which increases the beauty of the scene, as it meanders along through the bush-lined banks. The mountains with which the valley is surrounded, are covered with the most beautiful yellow pine, extending far down into the valley.”

Indian Use of Fire

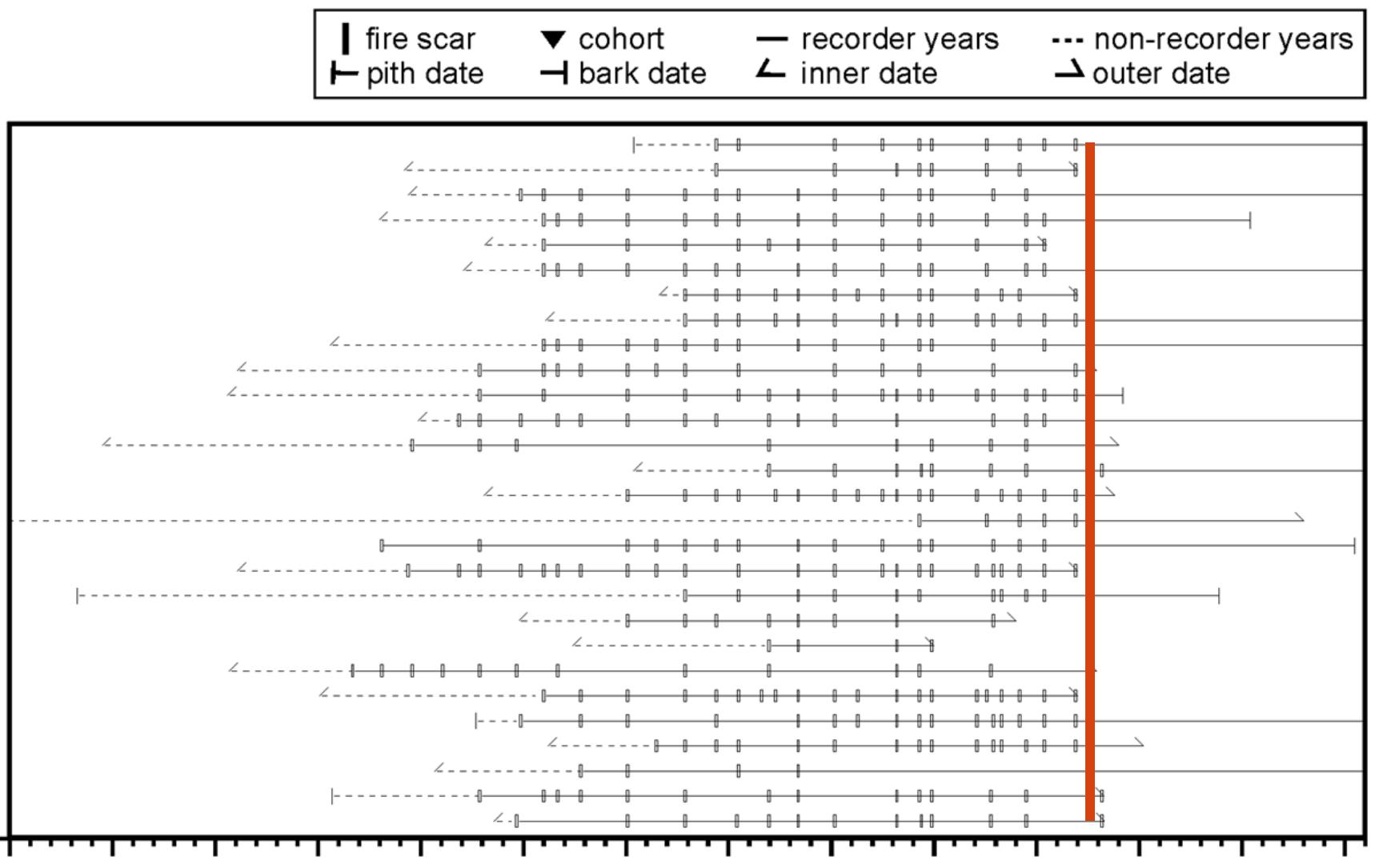


"In some of the ravines we find small springs of water; they are, however, rather rare, and the grass has been lately consumed, and many of the trees blasted by the ravaging fire of the Indians."

"These fire are yet smouldering, and the smoke from them effectually prevents our viewing the surrounding country, and completely obscures the beams of the sun."

- John Kirk Townsend, 1834

Fire History – Ochoco Mts.



Forests Along the Oregon Trail

"Thurs Sept 23 After traveling 18 miles we left the mountains and came into a valley. The mountains are 40 miles and they are blue ones indeed. They are covered with large pine timber, the first timber we have seen since leaving the Platte River..."

-Martha Read 1852

"On the mountains are thick groves of yellow pine, some of these are very large and lofty. It is delightful to enjoy the cool shade and tread on the rich carpet of nature's own weaving. The country here for miles is rolling and alternately prairie and forest."

-Ester Hanna 1852



**Homesteads, Lumbering,
Mining & Grazing**

Resource Exploitation

Early Forest Management

Homesteads, Lumbering, Mining & Grazing



Resource Exploitation



A photograph of a forest clearing. In the foreground, the ground is covered with dry pine needles, small green shrubs, and several fallen tree stumps. Behind the clearing, a dense stand of tall, thin pine trees reaches towards a clear blue sky. The trees have dark brown trunks and green, needle-covered branches.

**Restoration Forestry dominates
on Federal lands**



Forest Management Today

In Eastern OR there is a dire need for Forest Restoration

Result of Past Land Use &
Human Disturbances &
“Succession Gone Wild”

43 Years of Forest Succession

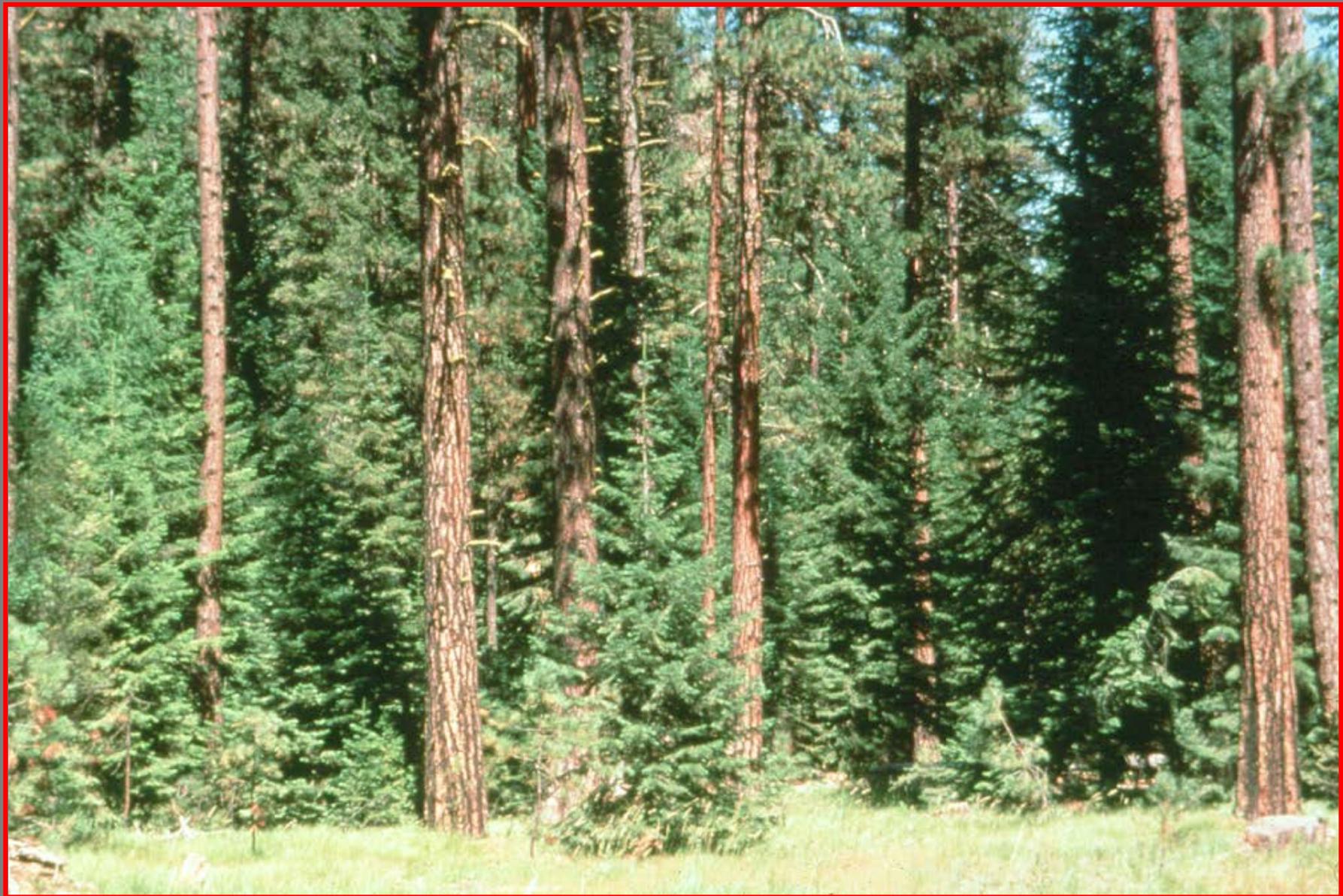
(Ponderosa pine/bitterbrush/Idaho fescue)

Photo series: Fred Hall



2001

Forests have literally filled up with trees



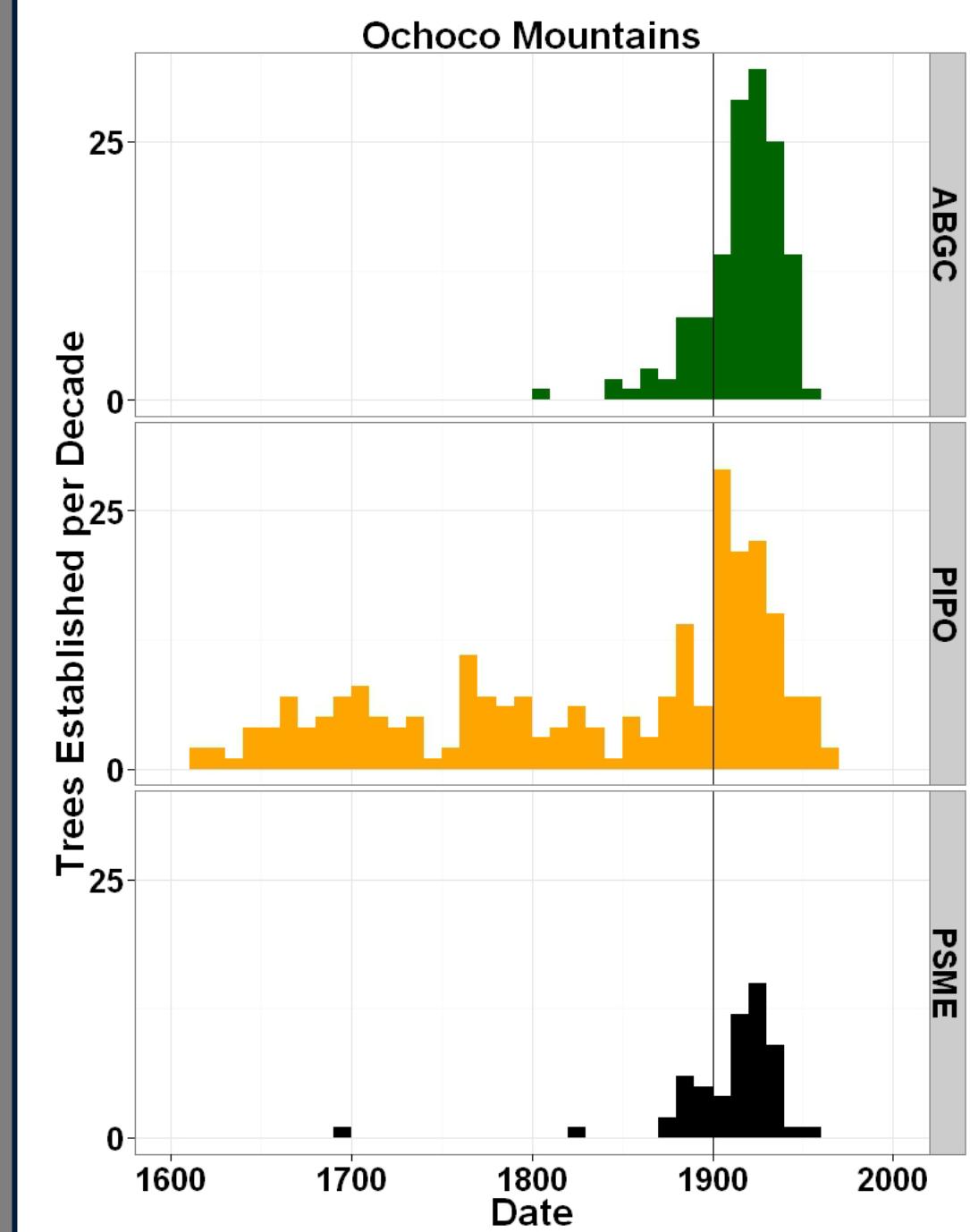
Problems in Old Growth Forests

- High fuel loading
- Dense forest
- Insects & disease
- Climate change



Tree Establishment Patterns

(Merschel & Spies unpublished)



Fire Severity Has Changed



Mega-Fire Trend

**What can be done to restore
our forests?**

Removing small trees/reducing shrubs



Slashbuster
cators

Removing small trees/reducing shrubs





Creating openings/gaps & age class diversity





Using Prescribed Fire





Thank You!