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## Forest practices a mystery to many

CORVALLIS - A new survey suggests the public is largely unaware of forest management practices and has some mistaken notions about wildfires, limiting support for policy decisions needed to improve forest health. **By The Associated Press**

The study conducted by Oregon State University and Utah State University questioned people about their knowledge and attitudes toward wildfire, and the use of controlled fire or mechanical thinning, overcrowding, tree diseases and other problems.

`` Although the survey identified pockets of support for many new trends in forest management, one-third of the respondents had given no consideration at all to forest fires or the condition of America's forests," said Bruce Shindler, an OSU associate professor of forest resources. `` There clearly is a lot of work to do to build public understanding and support, and until then it's going to be difficult for our land management agencies to do what's needed to address some very serious problems."

The national mail survey found that roughly two out of five of those responding agreed that controlled burns were a legitimate tool that foresters should be able to use as they see fit.

Another two in five said controlled burns should be done but only at selected times and places. Support for limited use of mechanical vegetation removal was slightly higher.

Other findings suggested by the survey:

- Most people get their information about natural resources from television, newspapers or magazines, but far fewer had any experience with federal forest agencies. Environmental groups and the Internet were rated even lower as information sources.
- About three in five of those responding had a high level of trust in the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service or U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to make good management decisions. A much lower level of support was found for the Bureau of Land Management and Bureau of Indian Affairs.
- Key management terms such as controlled burn or forest thinning were widely recognized by people, but only one in five were familiar with other concepts such as a riparian zone or forest succession.
- Almost half the respondents believed that humans cause most of the wildfires in the United States when most fires are caused by lightning, especially in the West.
- About two out of five people responding did not know that fires can be an important tool to control disease and insect outbreaks in forests and rangelands.
- About half the respondents said ecosystems should be left alone to function naturally.