



## Fire, Sagebrush, and People

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Big sagebrush (*Artemisia tridentata*) ecosystems are among the most common plant communities in the Intermountain West, but these fire-dependent systems are often poorly understood. The natural dynamics (succession) of plant communities in these systems revolves between herbaceous dominance immediately after a fire to woody-plant dominance when fire is absent for long periods of time. The length of time necessary to move an herbaceous-dominated community to a woody-dominated community may require a decade or a century depending on a number of factors such as the big sagebrush subspecies. Currently, sagebrush is a critical habitat requirement for the Greater Sage-grouse and is the focus of dozens of citizen working groups throughout the west. Providing good information to these groups is often difficult since sagebrush ecosystems are dynamic in composition and in quality for Greater Sage-grouse habitat. Sometimes scientists appear to provide conflicting information, thereby making management decisions difficult. Examples of some areas of conflicting recommendations involve the role of fire in these systems or the use of introduced perennial plants for rehabilitating these systems. This paper will attempt to highlight some of these areas of apparent conflict and will emphasize the importance of public education regarding these areas of confusion. It will also highlight the benefits of applying decision support tools with probabilistic outcomes for painting a more realistic picture of the management risks associated with this ecosystem.

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