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Fire Management on the San Carlos Apache Reservation

The San Carlos Apache Tribe (SCAT) and the BIA San Carlos Agency have managed several lightning caused fires for resource objectives in recent years.

The largest was the Skunk Fire, which started April 19, 2014. This early season fire started on the Nantac Rim, an area where local managers were prepared to reintroduce fire. Initial fuels consisted of brush, grass, and moderately open juniper-oak woodlands. The terrain along the Nantac Rim is steep and rocky.

Initially, the Skunk Fire was in a monitoring status because of its remote location and lack of spread potential. Management goals included firefighter safety, fuel reduction, and wildlife habitat improvement.

Overall, the initial BARC map shows fire effects from the Skunk Fire to be low to moderate severity, especially within commercial forests that had experienced timber sales and prescribed fire. Only small patches of high severity fire resulted, mostly in untreated forested areas.

The Whitetail Fire started June 15, 2015. For several reasons, fire managers decided to manage the fire for resource objectives, including an unusual amount of spring precipitation and its location being within other



Image of the Skunk Fire (2014) obtained from inciweb.

Fires At-A-Glance

Skunk: April 19, 2014

Cause: Lightning

Total Size: 73,622 acres

Vegetation types: pinyon-juniper, chaparral, conifer-oak, and ponderosa pine

Whitetail: June 15, 2015

Cause: Lightning

Total Size: 33,633 acres

Vegetation types: pinyon-juniper, encinal oak, scrub grassland, ponderosa pine

Sawmill: June 17, 2015

Cause: Lightning

Total Size: 5,667

Vegetation: pinyon-juniper, ponderosa pine



Image from the Sawmill Fire (2015) obtained from inciweb.

recent fire perimeters.

Whitetail Fire management goals included minimizing impact to Mexican Spotted Owl Protected Activity Centers, which was successful in some areas and less so in others due to the time the fire reached those areas, high fuel loads, and topography. Other goals such as mitigating risk to firefighters and reducing understory fuel loads in forested areas, were described as successful.

Per the initial BARC map, the Whitetail Fire resulted in a majority of burned acres falling into low and moderate severity, with only small patches of high severity.

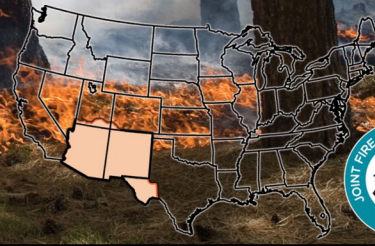
The Sawmill Fire, though much smaller, burned an area previously treated with prescribed fire as well as a first entry in woodlands and non-commercial forests outside the prescribed burn.

Goals of the Sawmill Fire included reduction of understory fuels and slash materials, minimize high severity fire effects in commercial stands via effective firing



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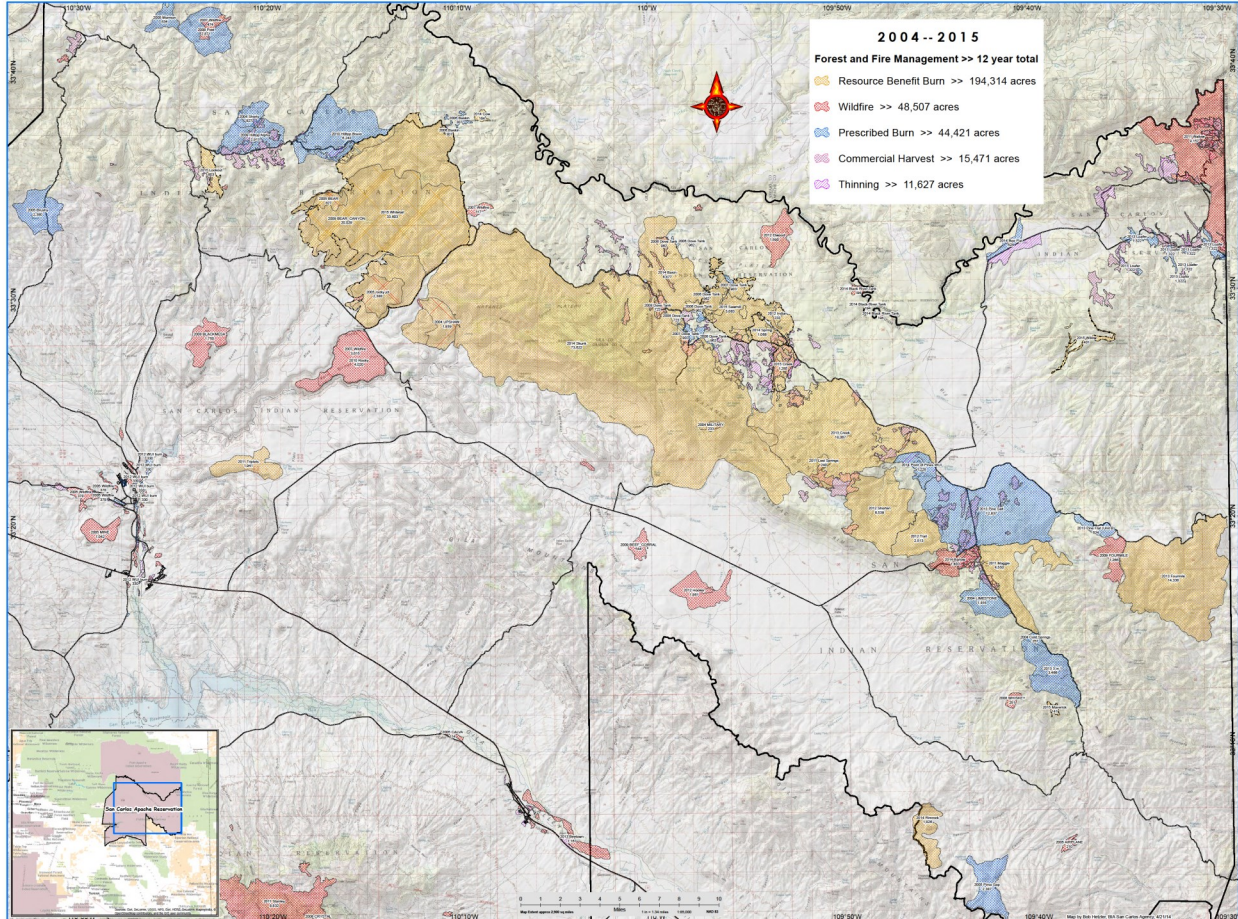
Above: Post-fire, post-green up image of a woodland area from the Point of Pines project (2014, courtesy SCAT)

Below: A look at the last ten years of rebuilding the fire mosaic (courtesy SCAT).

strategies.

The Point of Pines WUI Project included mechanical thinning by chainsaw, brush shredder, piling and broadcast burning. The objective was to create defensible space around the area, reduce alligator juniper and oak density, and promote growth of native grasses and herbaceous species, thus moving the area closer to a pre-preservation state. A mosaic of fire effects is seen across the 1,280 project, primarily low and moderate severity.

With projects like Point of Pines, managing fire for resource objectives will be easier throughout the reservation. The Forest and Fire Management Plans call for density reduction of woodlands in former grasslands and savannahs to move the vegetation towards pre-preservation conditions. Fire and forest managers are already fulfilling these goals, and are on multiple fire entries in several areas, rebuilding the fire mosaic.



This fact sheet and corresponding maps will be available online at swfireconsortium.org