

SMALL ASPEN STAND DYNAMICS IN THE ELKHORN MOUNTAINS^{TWS}

Jodie Canfield

Elkhorn Coordinator and Wildlife Biologist

Helena National Forest

415 South Front Street, Townsend, MT 59644

In an effort to better understand the dynamics of small aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) stands in dry habitats, the Slim Sam aspen project, located in the southeast portion of the Elkhorn Mountains, was initiated in 1999. Eighteen aspen stands were inventoried. Before treatment, on average, there were about four live sprouts/100 ft² and aspen stands were generally in a state of decline. Factors contributing to the decline in the Slim Sam project area included shading from conifers, old age, and browsing and mechanical damage from livestock, moose, and elk. Eight stands were burned in the spring 2002. Six of the burned stands were fenced with 7-ft high wildlife fencing during summer 2002. In 8 of 18 stands, conifers were removed and placed around the outside of the stand to provide some protection from browsing animals. Two of the stands were not treated. Following the initial treatments, ground cover and sprout densities were assessed for two field seasons. This presentation summarizes the dynamics of different treatments in isolated aspen stands and compares cost and effectiveness of treatment types.