

THE EFFECTS OF THINNING AND PRESCRIBED FIRE ON FORAGING PATTERNS OF BARK-GLEANING BIRDS^{TWS}

Jennifer C. Woolf
Wildlife Biology Program, School of Forestry
University of Montana, Missoula, MT 59812

Fire suppression in western forests has changed the mosaic of successional stages of forest that once existed. In the western United States, recent large-scale, high-intensity fires have been attributed to the lack of fire in forest systems for the past century. The Montana

Department of Natural Resources (DNRC) is integrating ponderosa pine forest restoration into their timber harvest program with a commercial thin that is combined with a selective cut and followed by a prescribed burn. Many studies have considered the effects of forest management practices on nest availability for cavity nesters, but little published information exists on how thinning combined with prescribed fire affects their foraging patterns. Snags can provide important nesting habitat for cavity nesters, but it has been suggested that food availability may be the limiting factor for woodpeckers. In this project, I examined the foraging patterns of bark-gleaning birds on sites treated by the DNRC versus untreated sites. I determined which tree characteristics are important in the selection of forage trees for five different species: red-breasted nuthatches, white-breasted nuthatches, mountain chickadees, hairy woodpeckers, and black-backed woodpeckers. Treated and untreated sites were analyzed separately to determine if the same tree characteristics were important on both sites. Selection of forage trees with certain characteristics occurred on both sites for most species.