

John Benton

62 Watson Road, Estancia

New Mexico 87016

Preferred Contact Method – Mail

COMMENT: PERTAINING TO THE MAGDALENA R D AREA

I am most familiar with this area. I was born in Magdalena and was on some of the forest fires in the 50's and 60's. I would like to give a little history of this area, in the early 1900's the area started to be homesteaded. First patented was where there was water, mostly springs, in the mountains. In the 1920's and 1930's more homesteaders moved in. Timber cutting was limited more to local or individual usage in the 20's, 30's and 40's. In the 30's nobody had any money because of the depression. Then the 1940's and world - war II, many left their homesteads and went into the war. Most of those never returned to their homesteads. If they had proved up on their land, it became patented, so they normally sold out to someone else. If they hadn't proven up, their land returned to the Bureau of Land Management.

In the 1940's there was one small sawmill near Datil. The Forest would mark timber for them. That lumber was used locally. Before the 1950's all the timber was cut with crosscut saws. Logs were sawn with gasoline engines and circular saws. Earlier, boilers and steam engines were used for power for sawing the lumber.

In the spring of the 1950's there was a fire on top of the Crosby's. My Dad, brother and I packed groceries and water, horseback to the fire camp. By that fall it was dry and New Mexico went into what we called the drought of the 50's. It was about 1952 that the Forest let big timber contracts, that a little mill couldn't handle. Soon a large mill moved into Datil called The Wolfe Sawmill. A couple of years later another one moved in by the name of Brown & Burdine. Also, another one moved into Magdalena along with a lumber processor, Moraine Box Company, that loaded onto the railroad. Almost all of this lumber was sent out. They not only cut mature Ponderosa, some Douglas Fir, also, Blackjacks were cut for the purpose of thinning and reducing the density of the forest. None of these were clear-cut, all were selectively marked by the timber markers. Later I learned that those in charge were afraid the beetle would move in and destroy the forests. It definitely made for a healthier forest. All the fires that I was on in the latter 50's & 60's were all ground burners and none crowned out because the fuel wasn't there as crowning fires are destructive fires.

I heard International Conservationist, Allen Savory, say, 20 years before the infamous burn at Bandelier National Monument that it was being destroyed by non-use, the trees were too dense, also, grass got too thick and was dying. That control burn in May, was the mistake. We always

considered the most potentially dangerous time of the year for a fire is March, April, May, and June in New Mexico.

Then there was the Wallow Fire in Arizona that overlapped New Mexico. Southwest Forest Ind. In Eager, Arizona was shut down in the early 1990's because of the Spotted Owl. About 200 jobs were lost. The Wallow Fire was in their harvesting area. At that time they said it took 480 acres for each pair of nesting owls. It would have been better to forget the owls and control the density of the forest because the owls got roasted. Did anybody ever figure the trillions of B.T.U.'s that went up into the atmosphere? I heard through the Forest that enough timber was lost to run a sawmill for 33 years.

The Southwest is a semi-arid region. Timber and grass being a renewable resource. I believe that all of the areas that were harvested before should be left in multiple use management so that the density can be controlled. Too many trees competing for too little moisture can lead to destruction. I see wilderness as a non-management program. Maybe there are some areas left that may need this designation, but I don't know where. Like the old saying goes, use it or lose it. Let's not let ignorance be the policy. Thank you for your attention.

P.S. A good example is to look at the Fort Apache Indian Reservation in Arizona and the way they manage it.