

**Examining the intent:
How does Clearing
work?**

By Victoria Metcalf

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Indicating what he called an excellent example of ladder fuels in the forest, a member of the Plumas Fire Safe Council explained what happens when fire is introduced.

The dried grass is easily ignited, said Jerry Hurley, program coordinator.

As it burns quickly, it touches off any dried debris in its path, as it races toward a patch of manzanita.

As the manzanita burns, at a level higher than the grass, its flames reach upward catching at small trees.

As the smallest tree in the nearby stand burns, its flames reach the lower branches of bigger timber.

From there the fire quickly spreads upwards, into the stand of trees. Sparks shoot off and land in dry grass in the surrounding areas.

Checking out the scene, Hurley explained how the sparks could start new fires. Flames from the trees as they crown could jump to neighboring timber.

Showing a spot where years of pine needles accumulated, Hurley said a fire-generated whirlwind could kick

up, further spreading fire and sparks.

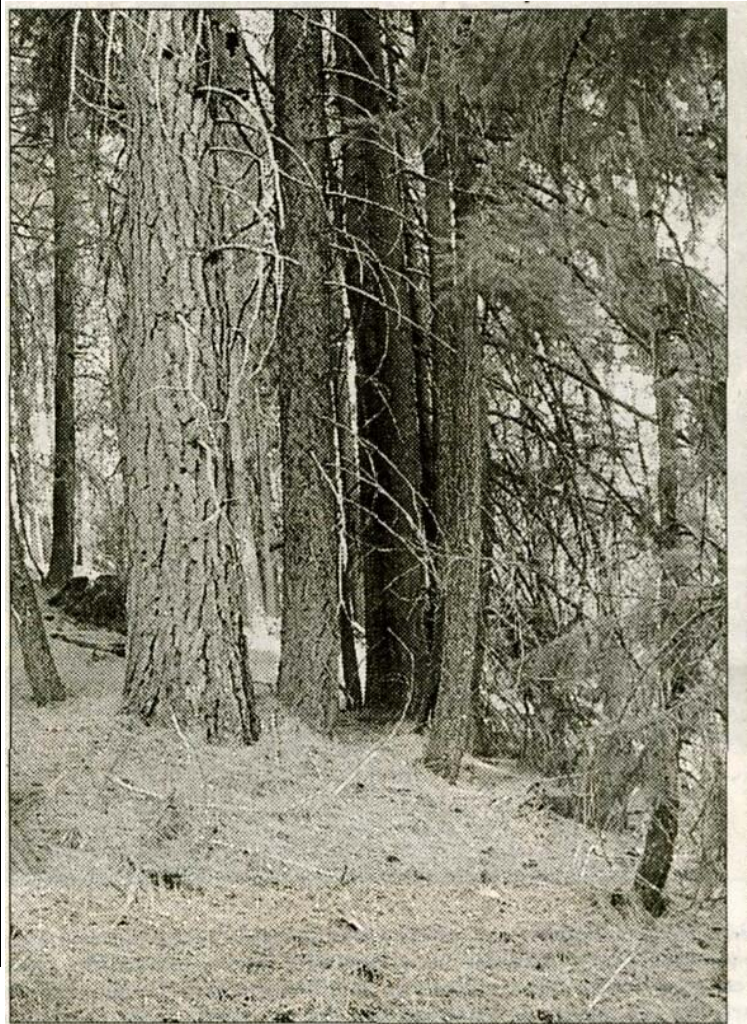
Indicating a shake-roofed home across the road, Hurley said it was prime for spreading fire.

If a spark landed on the dry roof, where bunches of dry pine needles lay, it would soon be engulfed.

And that fire would threaten other homes around it.

By reducing ladder fuels around Plumas

Eureka Estates, homeowners, Plumas County and the Plumas Fire Safe Council are anticipating reducing the threat of wild-land fires. Like in many communities in Plumas County, an accumulation of downed timber, dense clusters of trees and other vegetation threaten homes in the Plumas Eureka area.



Jerry Hurley said that much of this timber stand is probably pretty much the same age despite the different sizes. Trees that don't receive enough sunlight, water or nutrients don't grow as well as neighboring trees. It's all about competition. Their closeness also spells out increased fire danger.



This is a perfect example of ladder fuels, according to Plumas Fire Safe Council coordination Jerry Hurley. Beginning with a spark in the dried grass, it can gain height by igniting gradual levels of fuel until it is high enough and hot enough to catch living trees. From there, crowning effects, and fire spreading from treetop to treetop, can rapidly ignite other timber stands and neighboring homes.



Forest scenes like this are common. Fuels were allowed to build up when fire suppression was thought necessary. Instead of seeing the benefits of fire in nature, it was suppressed. Now suppression must continue because of homes in what is known as the urban/rural interface.