

Fire in the Superstitions: Effects of the Woodbury Fire on Wildlife

The Woodbury Fire burned nearly 124,000 acres, mostly in the Superstition Wilderness Area, from early June through mid-July of 2019. As soon as the fire was contained, Tonto National Forest put together a Burn Area Emergency Response (BAER) team to assess the fire's effects. Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD) staff worked with the BAER team and provided input on wildlife, habitat conditions and prospects in the burn area. AZGFD Game Specialists observed game and other animals and birds in both the burned and adjacent areas as they flew low level helicopter flights in a grid pattern.

Laura Orscheln, Wildlife Manager of local Game Management Unit 24B for AZGFD, will review the results of that survey from both short and long-term perspectives at the Dec. 11th SALT Speakers Series in the Apache Junction Multigenerational Center, 1035 N. Idaho Rd. from 6:30-7:30 PM in Rm. B-117.

In an AZGFD press release, Game Specialist Dustin Darveau, commented, "...we were pleasantly surprised at the amount of wildlife we saw within or adjacent to the burn area.... We observed 81 white tailed deer, a black bear, some bighorn sheep, a few mule deer, some javelina, and numerous small mammals and birds. Although there was probably some loss of wildlife, we didn't see any carcasses." He stated that this could prove to be a beneficial burn for wildlife, but cautioned that while some areas will recover quickly, maybe in 1-3 years, other higher burn intensity areas "may take decades....".

Laura will have flown over the Woodbury Fire burn area less than a week before her presentation, so may have some new information and perspectives relative to recovery.

Laura grew up in the Midwest where she fostered a love for the outdoors and wildlife. She obtained her bachelor's degree in Wildlife Conservation and Management, and worked as an officer for Colorado Parks and Wildlife for several years prior to moving to Arizona. As Wildlife Manager for Unit 24B, her responsibilities include the Superstition Mountains and watercraft patrols on Apache Lake. She has been with AZGFD for just over three years, and is glad to share any experience or knowledge which may enable her fellow Arizonans to more fully understand and enjoy the diverse wildlife resources within the state.

"Fire in the Superstitions" is part of the SALT Speakers Series, which is co-sponsored by the Superstition Area Land Trust (SALT) and the Apache Junction Parks & Recreation Department. Talks are held on most 2nd and 4th Wednesdays October-April. While this will be the last talk of this calendar year, the series will continue Jan. 8th, 2020. ALL are free and geared for the public.

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