

Variation Among Pinyon-Juniper Woodlands: A Cautionary Note

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Abstract—The recent emphasis on ecological restoration of forests has forced both scientists and managers to address the idea of the “natural range of variability” of their systems of study. Indeed, much work has been done to identify this range in the ponderosa pine systems of the West and to use that information to develop restoration prescriptions for those forests. The pinyon-juniper woodland, in comparison, has been more intensively managed for a variety of uses yet much of the ecology of the system is relatively unknown. In many instances we lack reliable information on the role of disturbance within the system, the importance of soil erosion potential in determining the response to disturbance, and how species composition may alter these relationships. While the literature outlining the response of pinyon-juniper to treatment is extensive, very rarely are the site descriptions detailed enough to allow the reader to place the results of the study at hand in the context of the woodland that he/she may wish to manage. Thus two identical management strategies may differ drastically in their effects. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the variability among pinyon-juniper systems and to call for increased attention to the effects of this variability when planning treatments aimed at ecological restoration.

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