

Was There a Drawback to Smokey Bear?

Did Smokey Bear accidentally have a negative effect on wildfire? After decades of fire suppression and hearing Smokey's message - "Only You Can Prevent Forest Fires", the public had been conditioned to reject any fire, good or bad. The message had failed to acknowledge the benefits fire can have on an ecosystem. Many plant and tree species are dependent on fire to complete their life cycles. It was not until 1978 that the Forest Service started using controlled burns, and allowed natural fires to burn in wilderness areas. Reintroducing fire as a land management tool required a lot of work, especially since some prescribed burns got out of control and burned thousands of acres. Most fire experts and ecologists agree that fuel loads need to be reduced in forests and rangelands to promote healthy habitats and to protect communities. In 2001, Smokey's message was updated to say that only unplanned, uncontrolled wildfires needed to be prevented, and that fire can also have positive effects on the environment.

