

Fire-Adapted Landscape Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape

The Sentinel Landscape Restoration Partnership brings parties together to conserve natural resources, protect working lands, and preserve the mission of Fort Huachuca in Cochise, Santa Cruz, and Pima counties, Arizona. This article explains some of the connections between fire and landscape restoration in this area and introduces projects keep communities safer and accomplish restoration goals.

Fire is a fact of life on the Sentinel Landscape. Historically, fires burning every five to 20 years kept woody vegetation out of grasslands and created open woodlands and forests with grassy understories. Monsoon-season lightning provided a source of ignitions. Fires started before the rains kicked in tended to be larger than those during the wetter part of the season.

That pattern holds today. Sensational fire stories tend to come from those May-June events that sometimes burn until July rains put them out. Humans have replaced lightning as fire starters in many cases, but resulting burned areas still come back to life. As our climate further warms and dries, we may be in for more of these events.

When wildfires occur, public safety is top priority. Actions in advance of wildfires can reduce threats to public safety and also help create healthier forests and grasslands. What is happening in the Sentinel area to reduce the impact of fires that are a natural part of our landscape?

Firewise Communities

Research Ranch-Babacomari, Banning Creek, Cochise Stronghold, Patagonia, and Ramsey Canyon partnerships are groups of neighbors who have made their communities safer in the face of wildfires. They work with local fire departments and Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management to plan for wildfire and reduce fuels that prevent safely protecting structures.

Thinning Projects

The Coronado National Forest and local partners are returning fire to the Dragoon Mountains to open up overgrown chaparral and oak-pine woodlands. Thinning and trimming pretreatments allow safer prescribed burning. In addition to benefiting vegetation and wildlife, the fuels project improves safety near developed areas.

Prescribed Fire

Fort Huachuca works with the Coronado National Forest to conduct prescribed fires that reduce woody vegetation and make ecosystems more fire-tolerant. Thousands of acres of grassland and oak savanna have been treated at regular intervals on post since the 1980s. Prescribed burning on the Bureau of Land Management San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area and the Babacomari Ranch has been aimed at restoring native sacaton grasslands. Regular fire reduces fuel loads and helps fireproof expanses of this giant bunchgrass. Since the mid-1990s, Bureau of Land Management, The Nature Conservancy, Coronado National Forest, and private landowners have burned tens of thousands of acres on the Muleshoe Ranch at the northern end of the Sentinel Landscape. Burns improve bighorn sheep habitat and create healthy grasslands that hold soil and keep streams clear and able to support native fish.

Fuels reduction treatments, including prescribed fire, will continue to play a key role in sustaining native ecosystems and livestock operations especially as climate warms and dries. Sentinel Landscape partners that conduct these operations ask for public support, including tolerance of smoke from beneficial fires, as they take the long view towards the health of our environment and economy.



B. Gebow



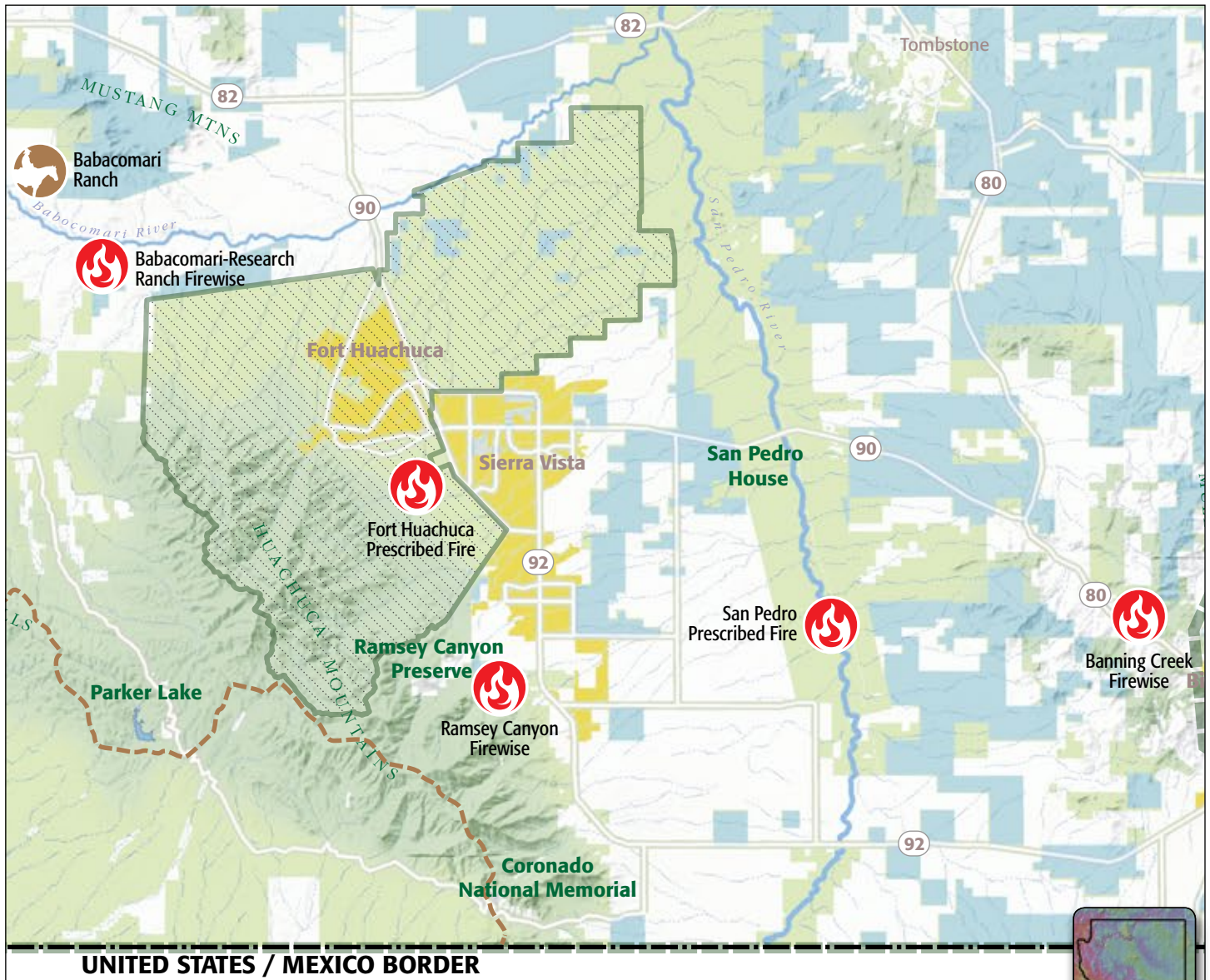
B. Gebow

Thinning crew opens up oak woodland in Ramsey Canyon. Thinned woods tolerate and are renewed by fire.

Fire Adapted Landscape

For decades, people have worked together to protect precious natural and cultural features of southeastern Arizona’s sky island region. In 2015, the Sentinel Landscape Restoration Partnership came together with an added twist—preserving the electromagnetically quiet area for the U.S. Army’s Fort Huachuca Buffalo Soldier Electronic Test Range. The **Fort Huachuca Sentinel Landscape Restoration Partnership** conserves grasslands and forests that provide habitat, water, livelihoods, and recreation in Cochise, Pima, and Santa Cruz counties, Arizona.

This “working landscape” hosts world-class biodiversity and offers recreation opportunities for residents and visitors. The diverse partnerships dedicated to maintaining these riches are made up of landowners, concerned citizens, scientists, and staff of local, state, and federal governments. This piece introduces concepts and projects that keep communities safer in the face of wildfire and accomplish restoration goals on a fire-adapted landscape.



Fire Project Examples

Babacomari Ranch (grassland rejuvenation via fire), Babacomari-Research Ranch Firewise (fuels reduction), Banning Creek Firewise (fuels reduction), Fort Huachuca Prescribed Fire (grassland rejuvenation, fuels reduction), Ramsey Canyon Firewise (fuels reduction), San Pedro Prescribed Fire (grassland rejuvenation, fuels reduction).

