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FEDERAL COORDINATING OFFICE

federal emergency management agency

MOUNT ST. HELENS TECHNICAL INFORMATION NETWORK

Friday, June 27, 1980

BULLETIN #29 - "Wildlife and Plant Community Impacts"

Much attention has been focused on the effects of the Mount St. Helens eruptions on farm crops and livestock. Many of the findings of such agricultural studies are relevant to wildlife and their habitat. The rich farmlands and noteworthy timbered areas of the Northwest are in fact products of past volcanic activity. The impact of these natural environmental cycles on wildlife is not quite so obvious.

Effects on habitat range from trivial to catastrophic. The blast area near the crater will take centuries to recover its coniferous forest, though windblown seeding of weeds and grasses can be expected at once. A few miles farther out, much streamside vegetation survived and is expected to spread rapidly. Heavy ash has been seen to slow plant growth but most plants seem able to push up through several inches of ash. While this is small comfort to farmers, it is evidence of a viable restorable wildland. The severest ash damage is to aquatic habitats, with resultant effects on fish. Gill damage and silting of spawning grounds are observed in varying degrees over most of the ashfall area.

Areas ranged by wildlife vary with not only food but also cover availability. Large game (deer and elk) have already been sighted in the blast zone but are not expected to take up residence in such exposed areas. Small rodents will normally move in as fast as the grasses, weeds and brush take hold. Insects, vital links in the food chain, tend to spread back into inhospitable areas faster than mammals, but near the

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