

The Cougar Creek Fire of 2015: An Overview

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The Cougar Creek Fire on Mount Adams lasted over a month, from August 10th to mid-September, 2015. It covered about 53,500 acres or almost 84 square miles, from the south to the northeast sides of the mountain. It was by far the largest wildfire on Mount Adams in recorded history—nearly triple the area of the 2012 Cascade Creek Fire. About 77% of the burn is in the Yakama Reservation, 11% in Gifford Pinchot National Forest, 8% on Washington DNR land and 4% on private timberlands. Around 450 personnel fought the fire at an estimated cost of 24 million dollars.

The fire was ignited by lightning just inside the Yakama Reservation boundary at 4,700 feet. It burned as high as 6,900 feet on the mountain's east face and as low as 2,700 feet on Klickitat bench in the closed part of the Reservation. It got as close as five miles from Glenwood and was uncontrolled along the upper-west edge in the subalpine zone of Mount Adams.

The BAER Burn Severity map shows areas of unburned, low, moderate and high soil burn severity. Yellow and red indicate stand-replacement, where all or most of the overstory trees were killed. Approximately 70 to 75 percent of the burn was stand-replacement, confirmed by infrared and Basal Area Loss maps. About one-quarter of the area within the fire perimeter was *unburned or burned at low severity*. Areas of high insect mortality in the Yakama Reservation burned at high severity. Most of the area burned in the 2008 Cold Springs fire *reburned at moderate severity*. Plantations were hit hard. Besides the massive loss of flora and fauna, the fire destroyed Yakama Nation facilities and equipment in the Recreation Area, as well as drift fences on both Forest Service and Yakama lands. Some cattle were killed.