

My door's open

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To the editor:

In a recent letter to the editor, the conservation chairman of the Maricopa Audubon Society attacks the ponderosa pine forest restoration treatments that my colleagues and I have developed based on 26 years of scientifically rigorous research. The letter was filled with incorrect information and unethical personal attacks.

For decades I have been an outspoken advocate of the need to restore degraded pine forests to their full ecological health by protecting old growth trees, thinning unnaturally dense thickets of younger trees, and reintroducing the natural fire regime of frequent, low intensity surface fires. The majority of environmental groups in the Southwest, including chapters of the Audubon Society, published a document in 1996 (quoting me and my work throughout) that supports that position.

An important goal of forest restoration is to reverse a 125-year trend of declining animal and plant species diversity. When there are too many trees, the grasses and shrubs cannot receive enough sunlight and water to allow them to flourish as they did before Euro-American settlement. The wildlife species dependent upon these understory plants decline as well.

Research shows that by opening the forest through comprehensive ecological restoration treatments, including thinning and burning, these species begin to return. The Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University working with a broad range of organizations is involved in the testing of nearly 30 different treatments to determine what we can do to help these degraded ecosystems heal. Our treatments always conserve and protect old growth trees and thin only younger, post-settlement trees so that natural, low intensity, ground fire can safely return.

I have made many attempts to share scientific information with Maricopa Audubon and have offered to lead field trips to explain why ecological restoration is important to the Audubon mission. My door remains open. My invitation still stands.

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