

Using Mulch to Control Erosion after a Wildfire

Wildfire May 10, 2010

Article Written by:

Yvonne Barkley, University of Idaho Extension, Moscow, ID

Using mulch to control erosion after a wildfire is a very common practice. Research has shown that mulching is the only treatment which consistently and significantly reduced erosion rates after a burn by immediately increasing the percent of ground cover, compared to gradually increasing cover by growing vegetation such as grass.

Mulch is used to cover the soil, thereby reducing rain impact, overland flow, soil erosion and the rapid runoff effects of water-repellent soils, in addition to increasing soil water content. Using mulches also helps control weeds, improve soil aeration, prevent soil compaction, regulate soil temperature, conserve soil moisture, improve soil fertility and beautify landscapes.



It is crucial to use certified, weed-free products or materials. Mulch is best used in high-value areas, such as above or below roads, above streams, or below ridge tops. Many types of mulching materials are available to choose from. Organic mulches include compost, manure (must be aged), cover crops such as clover and rye, slash, wood chips, shredded bark, straws, pine needles, grass clippings, leaf litter and fabric mulch. Inorganic mulches include materials such as plastic, rubber chips, gravel and volcanic rock.

For more information on using mulches to control erosion after a wildfire go to [After the Burn: Assessing and Managing Your Forestland after a Wildfire](#) – pgs. 62-63.