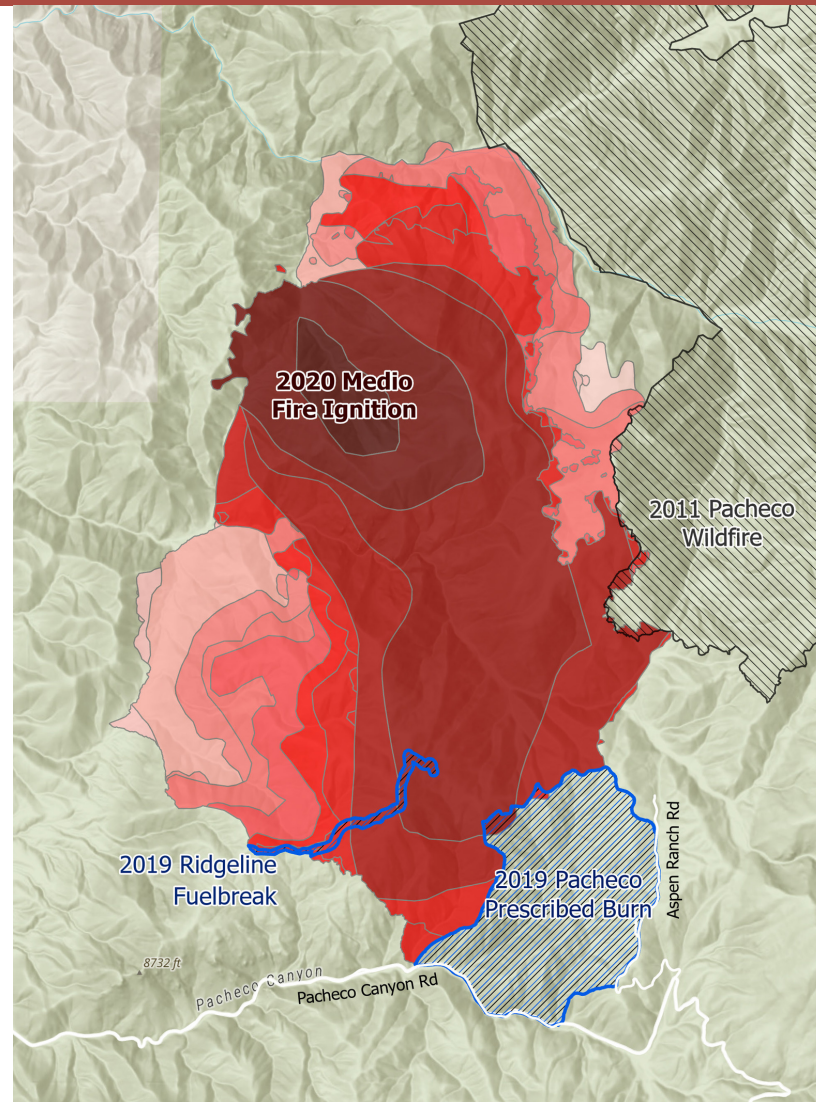


### SAVING A WATERSHED - A FUELS SUCCESS STORY

#### Lightning in the Heat of Summer

On Monday, August 17, a lightning strike ¾ mile upstream of Nambe Pueblo sparked a wildfire in the Rio Nambe drainage of the Santa Fe National Forest. The hot summer and weak monsoon had primed the mountains to burn, resulting in vegetation with little moisture, arid air, and rising temperatures. Named the Medio Fire, it was pushed by a strong northerly wind and grew to 1,533 acres by week's end. With this rapid expansion came sometimes severe wildfire behavior in the steep heavily wooded drainages - flame lengths of 200' and a flame front spitting hot embers ½ mile ahead, lighting new spot fires. With the extreme terrain and windy weather, firefighters had few options for stopping the fire. They developed containment lines where the landscape was more forgiving, far from the flame's active edge - called boxing it in - and started cultivating a contingency plan in case the fire burned through their box to threaten homes and infrastructure. Suppressing the Medio fire head-on with planes or human crews was too risky so the Incident Command team decided to deprive the fire of fuel by intentionally burning before the flame front could arrive. This is called backburning, but it is not the only time that land managers deliberately bring low-intensity fire to the landscape.



#### Taming the Flames



Prescribed burns allow communities to plan for smoke and reduce their risk from catastrophic wildfire

In spring of 2019, the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition came together to complete a 500-acre prescribed (Rx) burn and lay fuelbreak containment lines north of Forest Service Road 102. Part of the greater Pacheco Canyon Forest Resiliency Project, this work would play a consequential role in containing the Medio Fire as it burned southeast toward Pacheco canyon, Santa Fe Ski Basin, and several tracts of culturally significant tribal land. These ancestral lands are recognized by Tesuque Pueblo as belonging to the ancestral O'gah'poh geh, a pre-colonial designation for the greater Santa Fe area.

# SAVING A WATERSHED - A FUELS SUCCESS STORY

The 2019 Pacheco broadcast burn brought low-intensity fire to the landscape, reducing the amount of combustible fuel on the forest floor by cleaning up brush and small trees which burn easily, while leaving most of the large trees unharmed. Broadcast Rx burns also jumpstart nutrient cycling and create habitat diversity.



Low intensity fire on the Pacheco Rx

A year later this broadcast burn became a robust fuel break in the path of the Medio Fire. The Medio Fire slowed upon crossing a ridgeline fuelbreak to the north, then came to a halt when it hit the Pacheco Rx footprint. The flame front dropped from the tops (crowns) of trees and lowered to the forest floor, still burning but manageable. The broadcast burn provided a block of “black” - or already-burned - ground which gave firefighters a safe anchor, allowing them to work to contain the fire’s southern end and prevent it from moving up to Pacheco Canyon, the Ski Basin, and into the City’s municipal watershed.

These forest treatments did not just happen to be in the right place at the right time to contain the Medio Fire. They are the culmination of decades of work and planning to put measures in place which ensure that firefighters have a chance to safely manage wildfires, protecting homes and vital resources. This is the work of the many partners of the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition, including the Forest Service, Pueblo of Tesuque, The City of Santa Fe, Forest Stewards Guild, and more. They strive to treat our forested lands and ready our communities so we all can be prepared for the next wildfire.

*This briefing paper was produced by the Forest Stewards Guild and funded by The Nature Conservancy.*

For more more information and to see all the briefing papers visit us at:

[www.santafefireshed.org](http://www.santafefireshed.org)

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition is a partnership of agencies, private organizations, and concerned citizens who are working to build resilient ecosystems, protect watersheds, and reduce wildfire risk to the forests and communities in and around Santa Fe.

## Fires of Chance

tend to be high-intensity, catch a community off-guard, and put resources and homes in the line of destruction.

## Fires of Choice

allow the community to strengthen their forested landscapes while planning for smoke and additional impacts.

- The Pacheco Canyon Forest Resiliency Project is ongoing, with a final goal of 2,042 acres treated.
- Treatments are designed to tie together and treat high-risk areas across ownership and geographical divides, creating resiliency across landscapes.
- Learn more about fire regimes and prescribed burning by checking out the GSFFS briefing papers on Forest Restoration and Fire History.

Use the code to learn more about the Medio Fire

