



Friday, October 8, 2021

2:30 to 4:00 PM

Location:

Economics Room 1002

Benjamin Jones is an Assistant Professor of Economics at UNM. He has a Ph.D. and M.A. in Economics from the University of New Mexico and a B.A. in Economics from the University of Texas at Austin. Prior to coming to UNM, he completed a postdoc at the University of Oklahoma. Benjamin specializes in environmental economics and in particular he studies the connections between the natural environment, human health, and well-being. He is interested in measuring the “value” of human-nature interactions across multiple dimensions and in using this information to inform environmental and resource management.

Forests to Airsheds: Investigating Wildfire Smoke Exposure as a Financing Mechanism for Forest Fuels Management

Wildfires are increasing in frequency and severity in the US, especially in the west. Restoring overall forest health is viewed as a critical component towards making forests more resilient to wildfire. Given this, there are renewed calls to increase the use of forest fuel treatments such as prescribed burning and mechanical thinning, which can reduce wildfire risk.

However, fuel treatments are expensive to perform at-scale and increasing their use will require substantial reoccurring streams of financing. One potential (and as of yet, unexplored) financing mechanism is through reductions in wildfire smoke exposure. For many households in the Western US, their only direct experience with wildfires is through smoke exposure. In this paper, we collect original economic data on the value that Western US households place on expanding forest fuel treatments, if those treatments would probabilistically decrease household exposure to wildfire smoke. We connect forest management for wildfire risk to downwind air quality, a concept that we term “forests to airsheds.” To investigate this concept, a contingent valuation survey was fielded to a sample of Western US households in June -July 2021. Preliminary estimates suggest a median household WTP of \$3.57 to reduce household exposure to wildfire smoke by an average of one-day per year for 20 years.