

NAME _____ DATE _____

On May 18, 1980, the Mount St. Helens volcano in Washington State erupted violently, causing the top to blow off the mountain. A 300-mile-an-hour (480 kilometers per hour) blast of hot air, rocks, and debris flattened the surrounding forest, and a cloud of ash climbed to 80,000 feet (24,300 meters) in the air.

When the blast was over, more than 230 square miles (596 square kilometers) of forests, lakes, meadows, and streams were covered in gray ash and volcanic debris. In many places, the once-lush forest looked like a lifeless moonscape.

But, surprisingly, some smaller plants and animals survived the blast. Protected by snow, ice, or moist soil, they lived through the intense heat and wind. Within days and weeks, these animals scurried out of hiding, and the plants began to grow again.

Before long, winds blew in seeds and insects, bringing more life to the blast zone. Over time, the plants and insects attracted birds, deer, and elk from nearby areas, carrying seeds “hitchhiking” on their feathers or fur.

Today, many areas around Mount St. Helens still have a moon-like appearance, but most of the plant and animal species that were there before the eruption have returned. The landscape is gradually becoming a forest again.

Tiny red alder tree seedlings that were living under the snow at the time of the blast are now over 40 feet tall. These fast-growing deciduous trees create shade for other trees to grow. With time, evergreen trees that prefer shady areas—like Douglas-firs and hemlocks—will return.

Scientists predict it will take several hundred years for the blast area to look like it did before the eruption. Imagine all the plants and animals that will live in the forest then.



Mount St. Helens, 1981
One year after eruption



Mount St. Helens, 2010
30 years after eruption

Source: Adapted from Mount St. Helens—A Story of Succession in PLT’s Secondary Environmental Education Module *Exploring Environmental Issues: Focus on Forests*.

I LOVE MY
GREEN JOB

CAREER CORNER

VOLCANOLOGISTS (vole-can-AWL-uh-jists) have an exhilarating job!
These scientists study the formation of volcanoes and investigate past and current volcano eruptions.

