

Eshtaol Forest Went Up in Flames on Memorial Day

TOGETHER, WE CAN HEAL IT

On April 30, as Israel stood still to honor fallen soldiers and victims of terror, a fierce wildfire swept through the Jerusalem Hills. Within hours, 412.5 hectares of the Eshtaol Forest were gone, reduced to ash on one of the most meaningful days of the Israeli calendar.

This sad statistic joins the 345.5 hectares that burned in the forest just a week before, on April 23 – the day before Yom HaShoah. Altogether, in the period of time between these two national days of mourning, 758 hectares of Eshtaol Forest – more than half of it – went up in flames.



Planted in the early 1950s by new immigrants, Eshtaol Forest is part of our national story. Its lookouts offer sweeping views of the Judean Hills and the historic Burma Road, which supplied besieged Jerusalem in 1948. These hills saw both the fight for independence and the first trees planted by people starting life anew in a new land. As the forest grew, so did the families who built their homes around it. For decades, it brought life, beauty, and joy to all who visited.



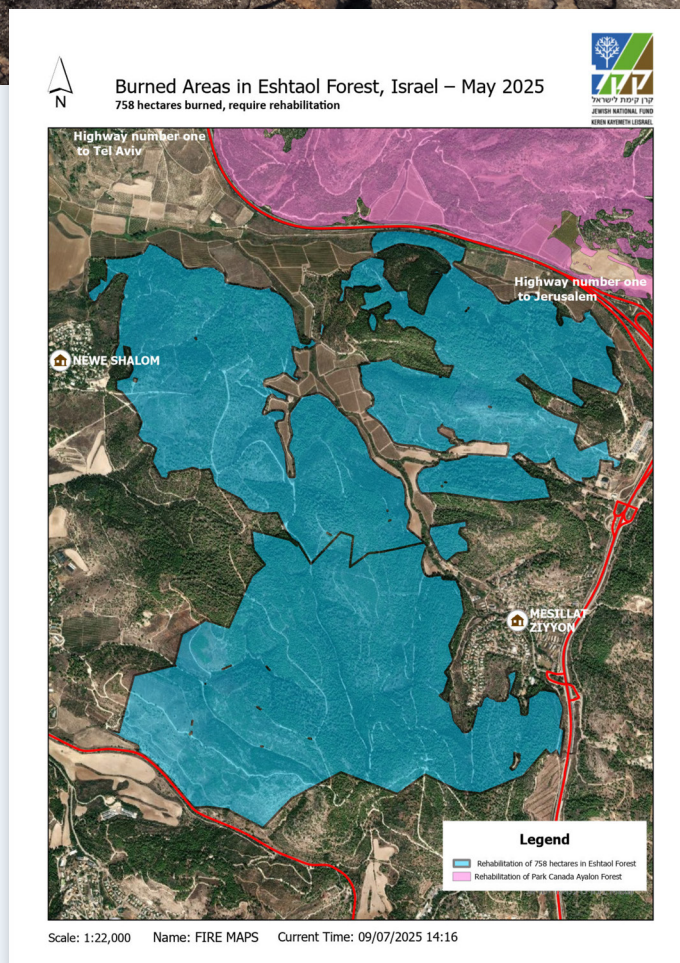


Photo: Chen Kalifa, KKL-JNF Photo Archive

Now, it's our turn to give back

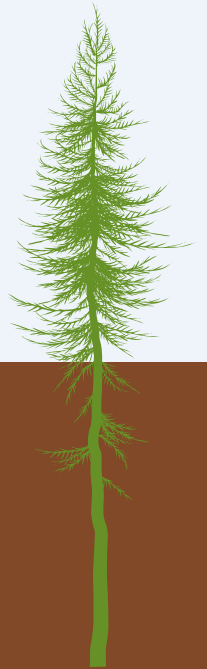
Healing a forest is not as simple as replanting trees. Decades of experience have taught us that immediate replanting isn't sustainable. Post-fire soil is hot and nutrient-poor. Climate change further complicates regrowth, as many traditional forest trees can no longer thrive without intensive intervention. Letting native plants regenerate naturally often leads to greater long-term resilience.

That's why KKL-JNF's restoration approach today is guided by nature and science. After a fire, the ecosystem begins regenerating on its own: grasses and small plants replenish soil nutrients, sunlight reaches the forest floor, and surviving trees release seeds. Our role is to support that recovery wisely and patiently.



Restoration takes time, and occurs in stages.

Your support is needed now for Stage 1:



- **Stage 1 (0–1 year):**

Taking immediate steps for safety, damage assessment, and to prevent further destruction. Your donation will help fund surveys to assess the damage, as well as the intensive labor required to remove hazardous trees and debris from roads and trails, stabilize exposed soil, and eliminate invasive species threatening the fragile ecosystem.

- **Stage 2 (1–4 years):**

Understanding what the land needs and planning accordingly. This includes ecological monitoring, soil and habitat surveys, and producing strategic plans based on the results. Please note: Many of the trees will have begun to grow back on their own, and it is only at this stage that we can begin to properly plan which areas need replanting, and which do not.

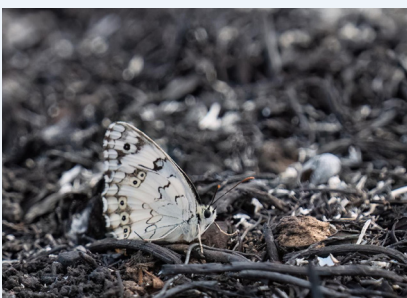
- **Stage 3 (5–20 years):**

Restoration for the long term. Selective planting where needed (with a focus on native broadleaf species), habitat rebuilding, trail rehabilitation, and careful reintroduction of native vegetation.

Some areas will regenerate naturally; others will need our help. The key is knowing when to step in, and when to let nature lead. The result: a forest that is more biodiverse, resilient, and climate adapted.



Bonnie Scheinman, KKL-JNF Photo Archive



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Your support makes this possible. When you give, you become part of a global family that refuses to let devastation write the final chapter. You stand with past and future generations who choose hope, healing, and renewal. That is the essence of Zionism: building, rebuilding, and never giving up on the land or the people of Israel.

Together, we can bring the Eshtaol Forest, a symbol of Israeli resilience **BACK TO LIFE**



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