



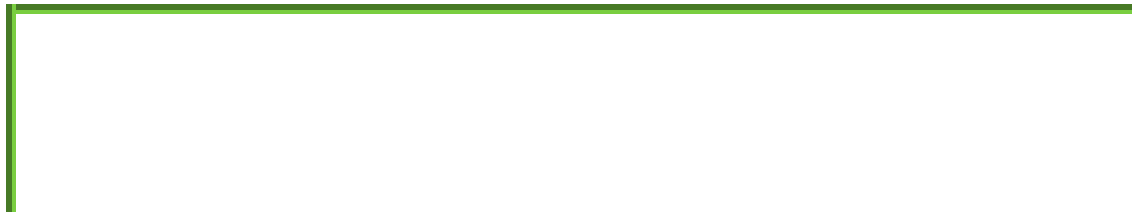
Protecting our rural environment by promoting citizen participation in sustainable land use planning since 2006

The Community Action Project (CAP) administers the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC), which is comprised of regional and local organizations, community groups, and concerned individuals who promote public participation in land use and resource planning to ensure a healthy human, natural, and economic environment now and in the future.

Learn more at www.calaverascap.com

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Join Us!

*Get a glimpse into what CPC membership is like by attending a meeting.
There is no commitment, just show up and listen in!*

Next Calaveras Planning Coalition Meeting

September 13, 2021 3 P.M. - 5 P.M.

New Members Welcome at CPC Meetings

Organizations, groups, and individuals (known as associate members) may join the Calaveras Planning Coalition (CPC). Prospective members may attend two consecutive meetings before making a final decision on membership in the Coalition. The membership form is a pledge to support and advocate for the Coalition's eleven Land Use and Development Principles, which you will find on our website:

www.calaverascap.com.

There is no membership fee. However, members are encouraged to donate to the Community Action Project/Calaveras Planning Coalition. Visitors and prospective members will, by necessity, be excluded from attorney/client privileged discussions.

If you are interested in membership, please email CPC Facilitator Tom Infusino, tomi@volcano.net, to receive a membership form, agenda, and the Zoom meeting connection.

To help prevent the spread of Covid-19 in our county, all CAP and CPC meetings will be held online via Zoom until restrictions are lifted by the Public Health Department.

BOS Meeting September 14, 2021

Planning Commission Meeting September 9, 2021

Redistricting Timeline

- **September 1, 2021 at 6 pm** - Pre-Draft Map Public Workshop: Supervisor lead town hall located in **Valley Springs - Jenny Lind Veteran's Hall** focusing

on Burson, Jenny Lind, Valley Springs and surrounding areas - **Hosted by**

District 1 & 5 Supervisors, Gary Tofanelli and Benjamin Stopper.

- **September 3, 2021 at 6pm** - Pre-Draft Map Public Workshop: Supervisor lead town hall located in **Copperopolis - Courthouse at Town Square** focusing on Copperopolis and surrounding areas - **Hosted by District 4 & 5 Supervisors, Amanda Folendorf and Benjamin Stopper.**
- **September 8, 2021 at 6pm** - Pre-Draft Map Public Workshop: Supervisor lead town hall located in **Murphys - Ironstone Vineyards** focusing on communities along the Highway 4 corridor - **Hosted by District 3 & 4 Supervisors, Merita Callaway and Amanda Folendorf.**
- **September 9, 2021 at 6pm** - Pre-Draft Map Public Workshop: Supervisor lead town hall located in **Mokelumne Hill - Town Hall** focusing on Mokelumne Hill, Mountain Ranch, San Andreas and surrounding areas - **Hosted by District 1 & 2 Supervisors, Gary Tofanelli and Jack Garamendi.**
- **September 30, 2021** - Redistricting data to be received from U.S. Census Bureau. [See announcement from U.S. Census Bureau here](#)

- Remainder of the dates will be adjusted upon receipt of the U.S. Census Bureau Data -

- September - November 2021 - County reviews new geography, data and prepares draft map alternatives from U.S Census Bureau data and comments collected throughout the public outreach period.
- October - November 2021 - Release draft maps to the public.
- October 1, 2021 - Release of post draft map hearing dates and times.
- Date TBD - Public Hearing #1 Post Draft Maps: Presentation to the Board of Supervisors. Review draft map alternatives. Solicit public comment on the proposed draft maps. Staff to receive direction from the Board based on public comments for map revisions.
- Date TBD - Public Hearing #2 Post Draft Maps: Soliciting public comment on the proposed draft maps. Staff to receive direction from the Board based on public comments for map revisions.
- Date TBD - Resolution adopting draft map presented to the Board of Supervisors.
- Date TBD - Elections Office adjust precinct lines to conform to new supervisorial lines.
- December 15, 2021 - Signatures in-lieu-of-filing fee period begins for U.S. Senate, Congressional, Legislative, and County candidates.
- June 7, 2022 - California Direct Primary

Local News

Local prescribed burn association established amid devastating wildfire season

Davis Harper / Special to the Calaveras Enterprise / August 24, 2021

The prescribed burn association members include ranchers, homeowners, academics, and staff from local, state and federal agencies, pictured together here at Columbia College.

A cohort of about 30 local residents have banded together to form a prescribed burn association (PBA) for Calaveras and Tuolumne counties.

The momentum to ramp up low-intensity, controlled burns—as were employed as a land management tool by indigenous groups prior to 19th century European colonization—comes as the Caldor Fire reaches over 100,000 acres in size and continues to char Sierra Nevada communities north of Calaveras County.

In a meeting at Columbia College on Aug. 11, ranchers, homeowners, and academics were joined by staff from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (Cal Fire), Stanislaus National Forest, East Bay Municipal Utility District, and the air pollution control districts for both counties, among others, to vote on forming the association.

The meeting was hosted by Susie Kocher, a forester for the University of California Cooperative

Extension (UCCE) in the Central Sierra, and Tom Hofstra, a forestry and natural resources instructor at Columbia College. Hofstra has integrated prescribed burning projects on campus into curriculum with his students over the past five years and was taking the cohort of landowners on a field trip to present the work.

Tom Hofstra, a Forestry and Natural Resources Instructor at Columbia College presents the results of prescribed burning projects he has conducted with students over the past five years to interested landowners from Calaveras and Tuolumne Counties.

Facilitating the establishment of the PBA, for Kocher, is the culmination of three years of workshops and training with Calaveras and Tuolumne county residents.

The group has been meeting regularly over Zoom in recent months.

Many of the attendees are landowners driven to the drip torch by a desire to protect their property, while others are interested in forest restoration, according to fifth-generation

forestland owner Lara McNicol of Tuolumne County.

“I see more diversity in political range in these meetings than I do in a lot of other places, because we all come to it with the same desire to help the land,” said McNicol, who is also an adjunct forestry and natural resources professor at Columbia College. “Most people have seen the effects of fire on their property in a beneficial manner, from ranchers who use it to improve the nutrient value of their grasses or eradicate medusa head to people who work to open upland meadows and create a more diverse forest landscape.”

McNicol’s family has been applying prescribed fire treatments on their property outside of Long Barn for over two decades. The work in their own “experimental forest” has yielded native wildflowers, mushrooms and sedges, improved water retention in soils, resilience to bark beetles, and an increase in wildlife biodiversity, among other benefits, McNicol said.

Informed by tree ring data from local forest research stations, her classes at Columbia College focus on utilizing fire to restore landscapes to their traditional fire return interval. That’s the amount of years between the time an area would burn before European colonizers started intensively logging forests and suppressing fires—practices fire scientists now point to as contributing to the intensity and duration of extreme wildfires, which have been exacerbated by climate change due to the burning of fossil fuels.

McNicol sees PBAs as one tool in an arsenal of tools to protect communities, forests, and watersheds on a local level.

Calaveras and Tuolumne counties join at least 14 other communities around the state in establishing their own PBA, although Kocher said there are others that aren’t reflected on that list.

The first California PBA was established in Humboldt County in 2018 based on a model from Nebraska, according to founding member and UCCE area fire advisor Lenya Quinn-Davidson.

Since banding together, the roughly 90 ranchers, volunteer firefighters, university students, environmental groups, and others who have joined the PBA, have torched about 1,300 acres together, Quinn-Davidson said.

Membership has roughly doubled since the association’s first demonstration projects.

Quinn-Davidson said it’s been revolutionary for a landowner to have someone they can call to see whether prescribed fire is a good fit for their property and to walk them through the checklist of safety and permitting needs leading up to a project.

“It’s opened up a whole new world,” Quinn-Davidson said. “The interest is outrageous.”

Quinn-Davidson, who has been traveling across the state over the past few years helping other communities start their own PBAs, said there’s been a major attitude adjustment toward prescribed burning from federal and state agencies.

Cal Fire, for example, has set a target to burn 100,000 acres per year by 2025.

A new position at the Cal Fire Tuolumne-Calaveras Unit, the fuels battalion chief, is one testament to the increased support from the agency for prescribed burning and fuels

reduction.

That position is helmed by John Frederick, who will serve as an educator to the PBA, informing landowners of the necessary permits and safety practices, as well as assessing what level of involvement is needed from Cal Fire on individual projects. That often depends on how large of an acreage is being proposed for treatment.

He said that with fire seasons growing longer, fires getting more destructive, and a lack of rain, the agency's resources are tied up throughout the year responding to fires. PBAs can help with the background work—ensuring a project meets permit requirements, writing burn plans, and conducting environmental studies, among other tasks—that would normally fall on Cal Fire staff to juggle with wildfire response.

"We need to all work together," Frederick said. "The more education we can provide to the public and PBAs, the more work we can get done. ... As we pool our resources, we can reduce more and more fuels as the years go on."

Kocher said she hopes the currently unnamed Calaveras-Tuolumne PBA will attract other landowners, especially tribal groups, to join and support community-based cooperative burning efforts. She said the group may also eventually pursue funding opportunities to hire a coordinator and purchase shared equipment.

For now, next steps for the PBA include helping each other learn more about how to burn safely and practicing together as opportunities arise.

"I think education and action go together," Kocher said. "It's a big endeavor to go from no knowledge about prescribed fire to lighting one by yourself. I think this is a great next step."

To learn more or become a member, contact Kocher at sdkocher@ucanr.edu.

Calaveras Public Health changes case tracking method amid COVID-19 surge

Dakota Morlan / Calaveras Enterprise / August 25, 2021

The recent drop in confirmed "active" Covid cases in Calaveras County—from 189 on Aug. 20 to 97 on Aug. 23, and to 56 on Aug. 24—is not a decrease in actual confirmed cases, officials explained on Wednesday.

Due to the high numbers of positive cases hitting the county's public health department, case trackers have begun following state and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC) guidelines for “prioritizing” case investigations and contact tracing in “high-burden” jurisdictions.

The aim is to reduce transmission within a community, as well as strain on local public health resources.

The CDC advises that health departments experiencing a surge or crisis situations due to Covid should prioritize case investigation interviews of people who tested positive for or were diagnosed with COVID-19 in the past six days “based on specimen collection date or symptom onset, if known.” Contacting efforts should be focused on households exposed in the last six days and people living, working or visiting high-density areas like congregate living facilities.

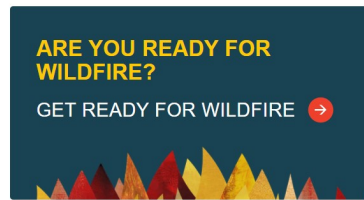
“What that means is if we have 120 positive cases hit all at once (say on a Monday when all of the weekend cases add up), we attempt to connect by phone with those who are within six days of their presumed isolation period to try to mitigate further spread,” said county Health and Human Services Agency Director Cori Allen. “If a person does not accept the phone call or is unreachable, there is no way to confirm they are a resident so they will not land in the ‘active case’ for Calaveras County. Anyone who is missed due to being unreachable or because they were not reached within a six-day isolation period window will land in the ‘recovered’ category without ever landing in the ‘active case’ category.”

Consequently, “recovered” cases within the county have increased by 185 since Aug. 20, totaling 2,571 on Tuesday.

Tuesday’s report also listed four Covid patients currently hospitalized—a stark increase from the one hospitalization listed just one day prior.

Calaveras County’s vaccination rate is 41.9%, according to an L.A. Times vaccine tracker. There has been a slight increase in the number of fully vaccinated residents since last week, when the rate was 41.2%.

DKY: Both Calaveras County and CAL FIRE offer emergency call, text and email notifications



Being ready for wildfire starts with maintaining an adequate defensible space and hardening your home with fire resistant-building materials. Give your home the best chance of survival.

SIGN UP FOR TEXT MESSAGES
Enter your zip code and phone number

Phone Number	Zip Code	
+15555555555	55555	SIGN UP

Use this form to sign up for text messages with updates on local wildfires.

Users are able to message STOP to unsubscribe and START to re-subscribe.

Sign up for CALFIRE alerts, based on your zip code here:

<https://incidents.readyforwildfire.org/>

And sign up for County Alerts via Everbridge based on your address here:

<https://oes.calaverasgov.us/Notifications>

**You do have to create a FREE Everbridge account to sign up for County alerts, but they are specific to the address(es) you provide*

'They need help now:' In Gold Country, PG&E fire victims have waited 6 years for payment

J.D. Morris / SF Chronicle / August 24, 2021



Leslie Kaulum, who lost a home in the 2015 Butte Fire, said more than 95% of her settlement hasn't been paid.

Yalonda M. James/The Chronicle

At the height of California's last severe drought, a poorly maintained pine tree in the central Sierra Nevada foothills hit a Pacific Gas and Electric Co. power line, sparking a wildfire that killed two people and destroyed more than 900 structures.

Six years, another drought and several disastrous fire seasons later, about 1,500 people who survived the 2015 Butte Fire are still waiting to be paid everything they're owed from a PG&E settlement fund. And the company's actions this year could determine how much money they get.

"I have friends that are living in camping trailers that are falling apart around their ears," said Terry McBride, who, like many others in her Gold Country community, lost her home in the Butte Fire. "It's beyond the word 'struggling.' They need help now."

Much of the money available for McBride and other victims of PG&E-caused fires is tied up in shares of the PG&E Corp. parent company, as part of a settlement the company reached before it exited bankruptcy last year. An independent trust is responsible for selling the stock over time, augmenting several billion dollars in cash it's receiving from the company.

But the stock price has struggled, particularly since PG&E recently revealed that it may be at fault for the massive Dixie Fire, which has destroyed more than 1,200 structures in the northern Sierra Nevada around Lake Almanor. PG&E shares are down 25% since the start of the year, leaving the victims' trust more than \$2 billion short of its intended \$13.5 billion value.

John Trotter, the retired judge who manages the trust, is blunt about the trust's current financial reality. He doesn't think he will be able to pay any survivor 100% of what they're owed. The total value of all claims likely ranges from \$16 billion to \$17 billion or more, he said.

That's tough news for McBride, 61, who has yet to rebuild the home she lost six years ago near Mountain Ranch (Calaveras County). Like some of her friends, McBride is living on her burned lot in a trailer.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. McBride, who is self-employed, said she used insurance money to pay off her mortgage, because she thought she'd soon have money from PG&E to build a new house.

That was in 2015. As of this month, McBride said, she hasn't received a single cent.

"I was OK living in this for a couple years, but six years is getting pretty old," she said of her trailer. "A lot of folks did the exact same thing."

McBride and other survivors of fires caused by PG&E are now anxiously watching how the company fares this fire season, as the effects of climate change manifest through warmer and drier conditions that are fueling severe wildfires.

There are about 70,000 people in line to be paid from the PG&E trust, including victims of the historic 2018 Camp Fire that effectively leveled the Butte County town of Paradise. Also included are numerous survivors of the 2017 Wine Country firestorm.

Yet none have waited longer than people who lost homes six years ago in the Butte Fire, which burned nearly 71,000 acres in Amador and Calaveras counties. PG&E started to pay victims of the 2015 fire on its own, but the settlements stopped when the company filed for bankruptcy in January 2019.

Now the Butte Fire payments are starting to come through again, this time from the independent victims' trust.

To survivors such as Leslie Kaulum, whose longtime home in Mountain Ranch also burned down, the funds can't come fast enough. She said she received "two little payments" so far, but it's "a pittance" compared to her total claim — more than 95% of it hasn't been paid.

Kaulum, 64, said the long delay in receiving compensation from PG&E has made it impossible to rebuild her home.

"How can you rebuild a home, at my age, when you don't know how much money you have?" she said.

Kaulum and her husband now live in a different house they bought in the Mountain Ranch area. She hasn't fully unpacked her belongings because she doesn't feel completely settled. She'd rather be at her tree-surrounded home of 13 years, but the Butte Fire reduced the house to rubble and consumed most of her pines and oaks.

"My trees on my property are my heart," Kaulum said. "(But) my land is not my land. It's different land. It's all grief and it's all loss. ... I know I'm still suffering and I know that PG&E effed up."

To try to prevent stories like Kaulum's from happening again, PG&E has invested billions of dollars trying to make its power lines less likely to start catastrophic wildfires. In a statement, the company said it "continue(s) to honor the victims of the Camp Fire and previous fires and all that was lost by continuing the important work to reduce wildfire and other risk across our energy systems."

PG&E funded the victims' trust when it exited bankruptcy last summer, but the company does not control how funds are dispersed. Instead, Trotter manages the trust, which is overseen by a committee of lawyers who represent fire victims.

Fire victims have sharply criticized Trotter and others who work for the trust, particularly after [KQED reported](#) that, during the first year it operated, the trust spent about 90% of its funds on overhead costs. Also rankling victims is the pay for Trotter and Cathy Yanni, the trust's claims administrator. Trotter receives a monthly fee of \$125,000, while Yanni bills at a rate of \$1,250 per hour — pay levels that trust representatives and some victims' attorneys insist are more than fair. Trotter works from home and has no assistants, according to the trust.

Trust representatives say they've been working hard to get tens of thousands of people compensated as quickly as possible. They note that claims questionnaires — the documents that are the basis for deciding how much victims are paid — were not due until late February. And the pace of payments has picked up since then, though it's still a just a portion of the billions of dollars in cash and stock that the trust has to work with.

As of last week, the trust had paid more than \$660 million to fire victims, a little less than half of which was in the form of preliminary funds sent to some of the neediest people. The trust says a total of about \$950 million in payments has been authorized, including hundreds of millions that can't be distributed until the amounts are accepted by victims.

Trotter said one reason why more people haven't been paid had to do with the amount of work it took to staff up and establish processes. More than 380 people were hired to help evaluate claims, which run the gamut from residential property damage to business losses, emotional distress and wrongful death.

"We had to build a comprehensive technical infrastructure," Trotter said. "We had no knowledge of how many claims — what they entailed, what the values were — that had to be submitted to us. We needed to create a system for that to happen, and it took a while for us to build that system. But we've done it and we're off and running."

Since the trust began processing claims six months ago, its staff found that about 60% had some deficiency when they were submitted, Trotter said. Some are easily fixed but others require fire survivors to find duplicates of documents such as marriage licenses or birth certificates — items that may have been destroyed in the fire. That task was made more arduous by the pandemic.

The settlement that underpins the trust was supposed to be worth \$13.5 billion, half in cash and half in stock. The trust currently has about \$5.3 billion in cash, and its shares are worth about \$4.4 billion. PG&E is scheduled to provide hundreds of millions more in cash — the company's final payment to the trust — in January.

In the months ahead, Trotter must carefully evaluate whether and when he wants the trust to start cashing out some of its 478 million PG&E shares, about 25% of the company's stock. He's not sure if he should wait until after fire season, hoping the stock price will rise.

"Those are the issues that keep me up at night," Trotter said.

He said he's trying to rectify a potential looming injustice: that people whose homes burn in future fires — or even, potentially, the current Dixie Fire — might recoup their full financial losses thanks to a recent state law. That law, AB1054, was passed in 2019 after PG&E filed for bankruptcy and it created a \$21 billion fund that victims of future utility-caused fires may be able to access under certain circumstances.

The goal, ostensibly, was to ensure that PG&E and other investor-owned power companies aren't perennially teetering on the edge of financial collapse as they try to make their electric systems more resilient in the face of rapidly intensifying climate change.

But Trotter is concerned that an unintended consequence could result in victims of past PG&E wildfires — like the Butte Fire — being treated unfairly.

"There's an unfairness to that that just sticks in my craw," he said. "Setting aside all of the legalities, from a humanity point of view, there should be some way, I hope, that people a lot smarter than I am can figure out how to solve this problem."

So Trotter said he's trying to figure out if the state might be able to provide more funds for victims of past fires. Trotter recently wrote a letter to California Attorney General Rob Bonta, which he also sent to various state legislators, asking to set up a working group of officials from the government and the trust who can explore ways of making more money available for PG&E fire victims. But it's not clear whether or when that effort might produce any results.

For victims who have always been critical of PG&E's bankruptcy deal, the prospect of the trust being billions of dollars short feels like some of their biggest concerns becoming reality.

Those critics were opposed from the outset to the idea that so much of their compensation would come from PG&E stock — essentially compelling them to root for the company's performance on Wall Street, regardless of what actually transpires during fire season. Some victims also feel that the PG&E bankruptcy and its aftermath have favored the interests of

investors, lawyers and the company over the needs of those whose homes and communities burned in the fires.

"It's really disgusting," said McBride, the Butte Fire victim who's still living in a trailer. "It shines a very dark light on our judicial system."

J.D. Morris is a San Francisco Chronicle staff writer.

Email: jd.morris@sfchronicle.com Twitter: [@thejdmorris](https://twitter.com/thejdmorris)

Sierra Nevada Conservancy Funding Opportunities Newsletter for September/ October



This is an electronic newsletter published every two months containing information on upcoming grant and funding opportunities for the Sierra Nevada region. The newsletter includes federal, state, and private foundation funders as well as additional resources and information related to grant funding. The Sierra Nevada Conservancy provides the Funding Opportunities Newsletter as a free resource under its Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program.

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Regional News

Climate change: do individual actions really matter?

What's happening

A [sobering report](#) from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released last week placed blame for rising global temperatures squarely on human activity and predicted even more severe weather in the coming years unless drastic measures are taken to reduce global emissions.

"How hot it gets is still up to us," Kim Cobb, one of the lead authors of the report told Yahoo Finance.

The new report adds to an overwhelming volume of scientific evidence that major changes must be made at every level of the world economy to prevent already-extreme weather events from becoming even more catastrophic. Governments around the world have established ambitious plans to reduce their carbon emissions. President Biden, for example, committed to cutting U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in half by the end of the decade.

The sense of urgency is also being felt on an individual level. Concern about climate change has become an increasingly important factor in many people's lives, informing everything from day-to-day decisions such as what they drive and what they eat to major life choices like where they will live and whether they'll have children.

Why there's debate

Stories offering advice on [what people can do](#) to help avert the worst impacts of climate change have become a staple of news coverage whenever a worrying new climate report is released. But many activists and scientists take issue with the idea that individual decisions should be the focus of efforts to stem global warming.

Personal lifestyle choices, they say, make only a tiny difference relative to the massive impact that corporations and governments can have if they were willing to treat climate change with the seriousness it deserves. Some even argue that these conversations can actually hold back the climate movement by providing cover for the small number of companies that are responsible for the bulk of global emissions — the concept of a personal "carbon footprint," for example, was first popularized by British Petroleum as a way to draw attention away from the fossil fuel industry.

Others say placing 100 percent of the blame on corporations ignores the role that individuals can play in reducing climate change. Climate change, they argue, is the result of billions of personal decisions over the course of decades, and reversing that trend will require the same kind of collective action that will inevitably be rooted in the choices individuals make. They make the case that governments and companies will enact top-down systemic change only if they feel pressure from individual consumers and voters to do so.

What's next

The massive infrastructure bill currently being debated in Congress contains a number of measures that cumulatively could represent a significant step toward decarbonizing the U.S. economy. One piece of the two-part agenda has already passed through the Senate. A second, much larger bill could be brought to the floor as soon as next month.

Perspectives

Both individual and systemic change are needed to combat climate change

“The problem requires sustained contributions from every corner of industry, every level of government, every academic institution, every foundation and philanthropist, and from all of us as individuals.” — L. Rafael Reif, [Boston Globe](#)

Collective action can’t happen without individuals

“We needn’t remove carbon from the atmosphere in one fell swoop to be effective in addressing climate change. We need to start where we are, use the talents we already have, and plug into groups and communities that are already doing the work. Building community around action should be our measure of success, and it can happen right now.” — Sarah Jaquette Ray, [Los Angeles Times](#)

Voters’ individual decisions will shape U.S. climate policy

“Ultimately, hope for change among Congressional Republicans lies with voters, who say they care about climate, but haven’t made it a central issue determining their vote. Unless and until that changes, I fear that U.S. climate gridlock will continue.” — Samantha Gross, [Brookings](#)

Personal decisions have a knock-on effect that influences others’ behavior

“Clearly, in terms of global greenhouse gas emissions, a single person’s contribution is basically irrelevant (much like a single vote in an election). But ... doing something bold like giving up flying can have a wider knock-on effect by influencing others and shifting what’s viewed as ‘normal.’” — Steve Westlake, [Conversation](#)

We must be honest about the fact that a greener future will involve personal sacrifices

“To be sure, making the transition to a just-green economy will lead to overall improvements in quality of life. ... But undoubtedly many Americans will experience some of these changes as sacrifices and will therefore be resistant and distrustful. It’s important for the environmental movement, then, to keep insisting that individual behavior changes are not only righteous but required.” — Jason Mark, [Sierra Club](#)

The most important choice one person can make is in the voting booth

“As an individual, your choices have very little impact in terms of reducing the carbon or other environmental footprint of products. It’s more about getting laws put in place or policies in place than individual purchasing decisions.” — Shannon Lloyd, environmental systems researcher, to [Guardian](#)

Individual actions are already changing corporate behavior

“Today, major companies the world over are being pressed by their investors, but also by their boards, CEOs and employees who increasingly demand firms begin to plan for net zero and what it requires. To be sure, there will be firms that still traffic in pollution and environmental degradation. But they will not attract the best talent. Those laggard firms will see climate risks jump, costs rise and equities underperform.” — Stuart P.M. Mackintosh, [The Hill](#)

Rich people can make a real difference by changing their high-consumption lifestyles

“When leaders like President Joe Biden say they’ll heed ‘the science’ on climate change, that should mean urgently enacting deep cuts to emissions, not just by the US as a whole, but by the wealthiest Americans specifically.” — Jag Bhalla, [Vox](#)

Personal choices are too small to make a real difference

Individual actions matter in that they can reduce emissions, and they do connect each of us to a massive global crisis. All of that’s good. But, alone, it is nowhere near enough to battle the climate crisis on the scale that’s required.” — John D. Sutter, [CNN](#)

Blaming individuals is a marketing strategy from Big Oil

“For years, climate action has been framed in terms of personal responsibility: if you want to make a difference, you can try more eco-friendly diets, commutes or consumption habits. But these personal changes deflect from the difficult and far-reaching decisions that need to be made to restructure huge sectors of our societies, like energy, transportation, agriculture, construction and food supply.” — Sara Schurmann and Bianca Ferrari, [Vice](#)

Personal choices matter but are a tiny part of the economy-wide change that’s needed

“Meaningfully reducing carbon emissions will require sweeping policy changes on the government level and an overhaul of the world’s energy grids. And shifting the supply of clean energy will ultimately affect consumer demand downstream. So while individual choices still contribute to overall emissions, understanding the nature and scope of emissions requires thinking more structurally.” — Lauren Jackson and Mahima Chablani, [New York Times](#)

The focus on personal decisions makes climate change a much more partisan issue

“Instead of calling for restrictions on people’s behavior, which will be grist to the mill for predictable right-wing reaction, we should focus on the kind of action that’s really going to be effective, like funding a nationally networked electric grid, or regulating emissions from the highest-polluting industries.” — Holly Buck, [Jacobin](#)

Our systems don’t give individuals the opportunity to make greener choices

“If you want to ride your bike to work and there are no bike paths and no provisions for you to take your bike on the road, every time you bike to work you take your life in your hands.

The idea that we can individually choose to go to a low-carbon transportation system is blaming the victim for the real decisions that are made about how we structure our cities, how we set energy policy, how we set the cost of automobiles.” — Robert Brulle, environmental sociologist, to [Rolling Stone](#)

An emphasis on personal choice undermines the climate movement

“If you can get people arguing over these individual lifestyle choices, then you are creating division over questions such as ‘Are you vegan or not?’ ‘Do you fly?’ So it’s a twofer—you deflect attention away from the need for real policy change, and you get infighting within the climate movement so that climate advocates are not speaking with one coherent voice.” — Michael Mann, climatologist, to [Scientific American](#)

As California burns, some ecologists say it's time to rethink forest management

Haley Smith & Alex Wigglesworth / LA Times / August 21, 2021

As he stood amid the rubble [of the town of Greenville](#), Gov. Gavin Newsom this month vowed to take proactive steps to protect California's residents from increasingly devastating wildfires.

“We recognize that we’ve got to do more in active forest management, vegetation management,” Newsom said, noting that the region’s extreme heat and drought are leading to “wildfire challenges the likes of which we’ve never seen in our history.”

Yet despite a universal desire to avoid more destruction, experts aren’t always in agreement about what should be done before a blaze ignites. Forest management has long been touted as essential to fighting wildfires, with one [new set of studies](#) led by the University of Wisconsin and the U.S. Forest Service concluding that there is strong scientific evidence to support the effectiveness of thinning dense forests and reducing fuels through prescribed burns.

But some ecologists say that logging, thinning and other tactics that may have worked in the past are no longer useful in an era of ever [hotter, larger and more frequent](#) wildfires.

“The fact is that forest management is not stopping weather- and climate-driven fires,” said Chad Hanson, a forest and fire ecologist and the president of the John Muir Project.

Many of California’s most devastating recent fires — including [2018’s deadly Camp fire](#) and the Dixie fire, now the [state’s second largest](#) on record — seared straight through forests that had been treated for fuel reduction and fire prevention purposes, Hanson said.

But reimagining well-worn approaches to forest management will require a reckoning with what is and isn't working amid the state's shifting landscape. In lieu of focusing funds and resources on fuel treatment, Hanson and other ecologists have said [the onus should shift toward home hardening and community protection](#).

"This is a [climate change issue](#), and you can't address it with chainsaws and bulldozers or even drip torches," Hanson said. "The only effective way to protect communities from wildland fire is to focus directly on homes."

Though fuel reduction has been part of Cal Fire and the U.S. Forest Service's practices for decades, former President Trump helped politicize it when he announced in 2018 that California's devastating wildfires could be thwarted by better ["raking" the forest floors](#).

Yet vegetation removal is only one among a handful of strategies that fall under the umbrella of forest management — not all of which were created equal, said Morgan Tingley, an associate professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at UCLA.

Tingley outlined three basic categories of work: prescribed burns, forest thinning and clear-cutting.

Prescribed burns, also known as controlled fires, are among the better solutions for maintaining forest health, he said. But given the restrictions, planning and logistics required for those types of burns, it's impossible to utilize them to any real benefit.

The Forest Service this month vowed to [stomp out every fire](#) that ignites — a statement of political necessity that left many ecologists grimacing at the implications for the landscape.

Even more controversial than prescribed burning is mechanical thinning, a vegetation reduction process that can involve chainsaws, masticators and other tools to clear out certain types of trees or densities of trees. While some ecologists believe that removing accumulated fuels can help limit the potential for catastrophic fires, others have argued that thinning can in fact make conflagrations worse.

One [2016 study](#) published by the Ecological Society of America and coauthored by Hanson examined three decades of fire data across the western U.S., and found that protected forests — those that had not been thinned — had lower levels of burn severity despite having higher amounts of biomass and fuels.

A [2008 study](#) published by Forest Ecology and Management similarly worked to combat misconceptions. It took a more tempered approach, noting that some forest thinning can be helpful, but also said that removing vegetation to reduce the size and frequency of wildfires is "both futile and counter-productive," and warned that fuel reduction should not be viewed as a panacea for reducing fire hazards.

"Given the right conditions, wildlands will inevitably burn. It is a misconception to think that treating fuels can 'fire-proof' important areas," the report said.

Among the primary concerns is that thinning a forest not only eliminates much of the forest's carbon-sucking benefits, but also removes canopies that provide shade and help maintain moisture.

The 2018 Camp fire, which reduced much of the Butte County town of Paradise to ashes, burned in an area of forest that had been logged for fuel reduction and fire prevention purposes, Hanson said. When the wind-whipped fire reached the thinned-out, sun-baked forest, it flared up so quickly that it arrived in Paradise hours sooner than it otherwise would have.

The fire ultimately destroyed 19,000 structures and killed 86 people.

"It was going to reach the town no matter what, but it definitely burned more intensely and got there faster because of the logging," Hanson said. "I think it would have meant the difference between life and death for most of those people."

And it's not just the Camp fire: A similar pattern can be seen in several other high profile fires, including the Dixie fire, the Caldor fire and the 413,000-acre Bootleg fire in Oregon, said Bryant Baker, conservation director for the Los Padres ForestWatch.

Maps of those fires fit almost squarely over maps of recently logged and treated forestlands, he said.

"We've heard a lot of folks in the Forest Service say that we need a paradigm shift in the way we deal with fire, and almost always, it's a shift into the same paradigm we've been in: Keep suppressing fires, and double down on fuel treatment and cutting vegetation," Baker said.

"What we're actually talking about is a real paradigm shift. We really do have to rethink how we live with wildfire."

One major element of that paradigm shift is home hardening and community defense, Baker said. That includes steps like reducing debris from gutters, retrofitting roofs and windows with ignition-resistant materials, and moving combustible items away from homes' exteriors.

It also means improving early warning and evacuation systems within communities. If employed effectively, these strategies have been shown to protect more lives and homes during even very intense wildfires.

"It's the one blanket approach that works," he said.

Yet even as crews struggle to gain a footing on the massive Dixie fire, Forest Service officials said the blaze is doing what it was intended to do, at least in part.

"From an ecological standpoint, [fuel treatment] is not really supposed to stop fire," said Ryan Bauer, fuels and prescribed fire program manager for the Plumas National Forest. "The treatments are supposed to make the forest healthy enough to withstand fire."

He pointed to successful fuel treatments around Meadow Valley, Butterfly Valley and Twain, where he said crews were able to hold the fire off from communities. He also said the Dixie fire has burned through a mix of treated and untreated land, as well as logged areas and burn scars.

"Certain areas of the forest are really well managed, and then other parts have almost no management history in the last several decades," he said. "When the fire's this big, it's a

mixed bag. It's running over everything."

Although the Forest Service had recently completed a large hazardous-fuels reduction project around Greenville that included prescribed fire, thinning and fuel breaks, Bauer said it simply wasn't enough to make a difference — particularly once winds picked up and carried spot fires over the ridge and into the town, with a steep drainage right behind the community also contributing to the extreme fire behavior.

Another challenge is that many communities including Greenville are surrounded by a buffer of private land separating them from the national forest, resulting in a patchwork of owners who are sometimes unwilling to participate in treatment projects, he said.

But what happened in Greenville adds to multiple examples in years past of fuel breaks failing to guard towns against wind-driven fires, which can launch embers right over them.

"There's no way to keep fire out of forests," Bauer said. "If you do it then the fuels conditions just become worse and worse until you get a really bad fire on a really bad weather day and it burns then. All putting fire out does really is defer the risk to a future fire."

Managers of the Plumas National Forest have known for several years that there was enough fuel on the landscape for it to be critical during any given summer when conditions are right, and it appears that time has arrived, he said.

"A year like this is the prime example of that, that year that we've deferred all of our risk into," Bauer said. "It's so dry this year that it doesn't matter how much fuel is on the landscape. The fuel that's there is going to burn. And we just have to hope that the trees on those landscapes are resilient enough to survive it."

One thing most experts agree on is that clear-cutting — or logging all or most of the trees in an area — has almost no benefits to the forests or to their surrounding communities.

That the Forest Service remains in the timber sales business is something that has left some ecologists flummoxed, particularly since the federal agency is still required to meet annual quotas known as timber targets.

"Clear cutting is a purely economic choice," said Tingley, of UCLA. "It is. There is no forest that is healthier if all the trees are cut down."

When mechanical thinning or logging are done for profit — or when whoever is doing it gets to use the timber they're taking out — that instead incentivizes removing the oldest, biggest and strongest trees, which fetch a higher price, and leaves behind the trees that are the least fire-resilient, he said.

In March, more than 300 scientists, stakeholders and community members signed a letter to Newsom asking him to reconsider his wildfire budget allocations for 2021 and 2022, noting that logging and clearance projects have "consistently failed to protect our neighborhoods from wildfire."

The budget includes more than \$1 billion to increase the pace and scale of forest management and fuel reduction projects, the governor's office said. \$100 million has been allocated to building disaster-resilient communities.

Rick Halsey, the California Chaparral Institute director who spearheaded the letter, said he is growing increasingly frustrated by the imbalance.

"There's essentially nothing we can do on the landscape to stop these fires because the environment is conducive to them, so we have to sort of stare that in the face and acknowledge it," Halsey said. "What can we do? We can protect communities."

That means focusing on making homes less permeable to embers, reducing flammable materials within 100 feet of structures and preventing developers from placing neighborhoods in harm's way, he said.

Hanson echoed the sentiment as he walked through the scar of a wildfire in the San Bernardino National Forest, pointing to dense vegetation and old-growth trees that withstood catching and spreading the flames.

If wildfire management could shift from a forest-focused approach to a homes-focused one, he said, more tragedies like those of Paradise and Greenville could be avoided.

"We don't need to lose another community — and another community and another community — every fire season," he said. "Once we start focusing on the right places, it's going to be incredibly effective."

This story originally appeared in [Los Angeles Times](#).

Op-Ed: The burning debate - manage forest fires or suppress them?

Char Miller / LA Times / August 23, 2021

As western wildfires burn through millions of forested acres, they are igniting debates about our response that are almost as heated as the flames themselves.

The leaders of the U.S. Forest Service have known that fire begets discord since 1905, when Gifford Pinchot became the federal agency's first chief. Randy Moore, who was sworn in as the 20th chief July 26, is no stranger to the conflict, after his decadelong service as the agency's regional forester for California. Since 2017, our fire-prone state — and its many national forests — have endured its [eight largest fires ever](#).

Despite his extensive experience, Moore probably did not expect to be burned even before assuming his new post. But he was, courtesy of a lightning-struck, smoldering pine rooted in

a granite-rough ridge in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest in early July.

When the fire was spotted, Forest Service personnel determined there was no immediate danger of fire spread. They would monitor it. But for the health of the forest, where fire is regenerative, and for reasons of resource management and firefighter safety, this was the kind of fire they wouldn't move immediately to put it out.

A week later, gusting winds fanned sparks outward, and what came to be known as the Tamarack fire has been burning ever since. Although the 68,000-acre blaze now is more than 80% contained, there has been no containing the resulting the fight that erupted over the initial handling of the fire.

Angry California and Nevada politicians attacked the Forest Service's decision not to extinguish the smoking tree. On July 20, Rep. Tom McClintock (R-Elk Grove) demanded that the outgoing chief retract the "current U.S. Forest Service direction that allows wildfires to burn and instruct all Regional Foresters that all wildfires should be suppressed as soon as possible."

Moore responded with a memo Aug. 2. He conceded that in a "fire year different from any before" the Forest Service should stop managing fires for "resource benefit" — that is, to improve ecosystem health — and instead suppress them. "We are in a 'triage mode,'" he wrote, and the agency's focus now "must be on fires that threaten communities and infrastructure." This was, he concluded, the most "prudent course of action now in a situation that is dynamic and fluid."

Moore's "prudent course ... now" language, however, isn't prudent enough for some. The National Wildfire Institute, a suppression-friendly bloc of retired Forest Service officials, said the initial Tamarack decision bore the "hallmarks of criminal negligence." "It's time," they wrote in a letter to Moore, "to declare that all fires will be promptly and aggressively extinguished, period."

But other Forest Service veterans disagree, urging the new chief to reverse his Aug. 2 directive.

Steve Arno, a former research forester at the Rocky Mountain Research Station, argued for accepting fire, not fighting it tooth and nail: "Fire will continue to be a fact of life in our forests, but ... we can influence the way fire affects our forest by managing its structure and its fuel using mechanical treatments, fuel removal, pile burning, and prescribed fire." Arno's post, on the Wildfire Today website, is a concise summary of a much more balanced approach than suppression; we might call it the "let it burn when you can" policy.

The debate within the agency defies permanent resolution, not least because deference to political exigencies is baked into the Forest Service's DNA. For that, we can thank, or blame, Pinchot.

In an 1899 article in National Geographic, Pinchot clearly detailed wildfire's essential role in regenerating forests in the South and mountainous West. But despite this robust ecological evidence, it would be fire's bad optics that drove his pitch for establishing the Forest Service: "Probably the greatest single benefit derived by the community and the nation from

forest reserves," reads the agency's [first manual](#), "is insurance against destruction of property, timber resources, and water supply by fire."

Pinchot's successors concurred. In the 1930s, the agency invented the "10 a.m. rule" — extinguish fires within a day of their discovery. Twenty years later, with military-surplus bulldozers and airplanes (and war-trained paratroopers), an emboldened Forest Service battled fires everywhere, a stance the public came to expect but one that increasingly came to be seen as counter to forest health.

Moore's opening salvo attempts to have it both ways — tipping toward suppression but specifically denying that the Forest Service will return to a 10 a.m. rule.

If the Forest Service's past frames the management-suppression debate, so does a spectacularly difficult present.

Moore's Aug. 2 directive is meant to be temporary, with "all the tools in our toolbox, including wildfire and prescribed fire" going back into place "when western fire activity abates." Yet California already experiences significant fire activity 12 months a year. The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's [latest report](#) essentially predicts that western fire activity will continue for decades, if not longer — a direct result of the dangerous interplay between greenhouse gas emissions, Earth's rapid warming, devastating heat waves and drought.

Fire suppression will not alter this unsettling dynamic. We paradoxically need more fire, not less — targeted, site-specific reintroductions designed to restore ecosystem health. This may seem counterintuitive, but as forest ranger and firefighter Allen Calbrick advised Pinchot in 1940, fire is "nature's way of cleaning up her backyard" and providing "good clean ground on which to grow."

"When man tries to improve on it," he continued, "we generally get things unbalanced."

Char Miller is professor of environmental analysis and history at Pomona College and the author of "Not So Golden State: Sustainability vs. the California Dream."

This story originally appeared in [Los Angeles Times](#).

EXPLAINER: Why it takes months to subdue some wildfires

Keith Ridler / Explainer / August 21, 2021

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — At nearly every community meeting on firefighting efforts in the U.S. West, residents want to know why crews don't simply put out the flames to save their homes and the valuable forests surrounding them.

It's not that simple, wildfire managers say, and the reasons are many, some of them decades in the making and tied to climate change. The cumulative result has been an increase in gigantic wildfires with extreme and unpredictable behavior threatening communities that in some instances didn't exist a few decades ago.

"How do we balance that risk to allow firefighters to be successful without transferring too much of that risk to the public?" said Evans Kuo, a "Type 1" incident commander assigned to the nation's biggest and most dangerous wildfires. "I wish it wasn't the case, but it's a zero-sum game."

More than 20,000 wildland firefighters are battling some 100 large wildfires in the U.S West. Their goal is "containment," meaning a fuel break has been built around the entire fire using natural barriers or manmade lines, often created with bulldozers or ground crews with hand tools.

Estimated containment dates for some wildfires now burning aren't until October or November.

WHY SO LONG?

A big concern is safety. Kuo said residents sometimes plead with him to send firefighters into areas where he knows they could get killed.

"That's a deal-breaker," he said on a day off after 18 straight days of 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. shifts on a wildfire in Washington state. "I'm not putting people at risk."

Actually putting out these large fires, or labeling them "controlled," will require cold weather combined with rain or snow, weeks away for many states.

"I'd say pray for rain because that's the only thing that's going to get us out of this fire season," Idaho's state forester, Craig Foss, told Republican Gov. Brad Little and other state officials this week during a discussion of the wildfire season.

HAVE WILDFIRES CHANGED?

Kuo has been fighting wildfires for 30 years with the U.S. Forest Service, spending the first part of his career as a frontline firefighter with groundcrews, the backbone of any effort to stop a wildfire. At the time, wildfires of 150 square miles (390 square kilometers) were uncommon. Now blazes reach five times that size and more, getting large enough to create their own weather.

"That's kind of redefining what the new normal is," said Kuo. "We get these megafires."

IS WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION IN THE PAST PLAYING A ROLE NOW?

For much of the last century, firefighters had been mostly successful at suppressing wildfires in ecosystems that evolved to rely on wildfire. Early on, firefighters benefitted from forests that had already been periodically cleared of brush and debris by wildfires that could move through every couple decades. But with fire suppression, experts say, that brush and debris accumulated to where now, wildfires can ladder up into the branches and into the crowns of large trees, creating the giant wildfires that kill entire swatches of a forest.

HOW HAS DROUGHT IMPACTED WILDFIRE SUPPRESSION?

On top of fire suppression have been several decades of drought that studies link to human-caused climate change. That's exacerbated by this year's hot and dry weather, leading to historically low moisture contents in forests that have become tinder-dry.

"Our protection districts are seeing far warmer and dryer than normal conditions creating historically dry fuels," said Dustin Miller, director of the Idaho Department of Lands.

Those dry fuels allow wildfires to spread more quickly. On big fires, embers can shoot out to start spot fires on the other sides of natural barriers such as rivers. Sometimes spot fires can put firefighters at risk of being trapped by flames in front and behind them.

Miller said the state is likely facing \$100 million in costs to fight fires this year on land the state is responsible for protecting, which is mostly state forests but also includes some federal and private forests.

WHAT ABOUT DISEASE AND INSECT INFESTATION?

Disease and bug infestations in trees whose defenses have been weakened by drought have led to forest-wide epidemics that have killed millions of trees in the U.S. West. Those dead trees, called snags, become fuel for wildfires while at the same time posing increased danger to firefighters who can be hit by falling branches or the unstable trees themselves.

ARE MORE HOMES IN WILD AREAS AN ISSUE?

Homes built in what firefighters call the wildland-urban interface pose special problems for firefighters, typically tying up many firefighters on structure protection rather than have them actively engaging a wildfire.

"We base our strategy and tactics on protecting values at risk," Kuo said. "Homes, subdivisions, communications towers, gas pipelines, railways and roadways, transmission lines."

He said homes built with defensible space helps. More people in forested areas, as well as people recreating, has led to more human-caused wildfires. The National Interagency Fire Center in Boise says humans cause about 87% of all wildfires each year.

ARE THERE ENOUGH FIREFIGHTERS?

The nation has just more than 20 Type 1 response teams to handle the nation's biggest wildfires fires, and Kuo and his colleagues on those teams, like just about every other firefighting position this year, are in short supply.

He and his crew agreed to work longer than their 14-day shift on the Washington fire to make sure another Type 1 crew would be available.

Another problem is lengthening wildfire seasons mean many seasonal firefighters leave for school well before wildfire season ends.

Josh Harvey, fire management bureau chief for the Lands Department, said about 30% of the state's firefighters head back to school. Overall, Harvey said there have been widespread

shortages of firefighters, fire engines and logistical support, and the state can no longer rely on help from neighboring states or federal partners.

There have even been occasional shortages of jet fuel for retardant bombers in some states.

“We’ve never seen anything like it before,” Harvey said. “We are living and making fire history right now.”



Sunset from Cape Horn (c) yosemitenorthphotography.com

i once knew a man

By Lucille Clifton

*i once knew a man who had wild horses killed.
when he told about it
the words came galloping out of his mouth*

*and shook themselves and headed off in
every damn direction. his tongue
was wild and wide and spinning when he talked
and the people he looked at closed their eyes
and tore the skins off their backs as they walked away
and stopped eating meat.
there was no holding him once he got started;
he had had wild horses killed one time and
they rode him to his grave.*

from Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969—1980, copyright 1987 by Lucille Clifton



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