

Our View: Fire Should Be Our First Priority

The Union
August 10, 2018

Unlike government, fire isn't concerned about legal boundaries.

Fire will scorch public and private land alike. State or federal, yours or mine, fire is content to burn it all.

This is why we must stop pointing fingers and work together to ensure future fires cause the least amount of damage as possible.

The Carr Fire near Redding, along with several other fires currently burning throughout California, should impress on us the importance of teamwork and the need for a single vision to combat these blazes.

We can no longer divide ourselves into environmentalist and pro-logging camps. The days of tree huggers and tree cutters must end.

Competing interests should give way to the only goal that matters: stopping fire.

Of course, managing an ever-changing, massive ecosystem is a lot easier said than done.

We've got a checkerboard patchwork of properties across this area, with an array of public and private owners filling in the spaces. It'll be difficult to find common ground in this situation.

We should start by getting all the players at the table. The United States Forest Service, the federal Department of Agriculture, the National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Cal Fire — these agencies and more need to collaborate and create a playbook we all work from.

As the old saying goes: we've hugged our trees to death. In Nevada County we've built homes in a fuel patch for fire and tossed any management plan into the flames. Then we question why firefighters can't drive through burning manzanita to rescue our property.

Managing our forests must be part of our universal playbook. Dead trees should be removed and sold. Logging camps and biomass plants are needed for processing the wood.

Fire once thinned our forests long before we were here. Now we spend billions of dollars — almost \$4 billion last year alone — fighting the annual blazes that run through our state because we refuse to properly manage our forests.

We should spend more money, a lot more, on fire prevention. These dollars would go farther and be more effective than having firefighters from other states and countries come to California to help us fight our fires.

This state supposedly has a budget surplus of over \$6 billion. Let's consider earmarking some of that money for stopping fires before they start.

Much of these fires burn on federal land. California should help fire prevention efforts on these lands, but it shouldn't shoulder a majority of the burden.

Property owners can do their part by clearing defensible space. Securing millions of dollars for fire prevention requires a concerted effort on the part of our elected officials.

The Nevada County Board of Supervisors can only do so much. Its membership with the Rural County Representatives of California is key to gaining the necessary funds.

That organization issued a plea this week to the state Legislature and its Wildfire Preparedness and Response Legislative Conference Committee. In that plea it asks for expanded partnerships with federal land managers, streamlining the permitting and regulatory system and promoting the use of wood products.

Sounds like we're not the only ones who want our government officials on the same page.

We're under three months away from the general election. We urge all voters to ask candidates for state and federal office for their views on forest management and fire prevention. Discover what they'll do to solve this problem if elected.

Consider their views when making your vote. It's not the only issue that matters, but it's a large one and deserves your thought.

Because a lot of the other issues don't matter if this one goes up in smoke.

Our View is the consensus opinion of The Union Editorial Board, a group of editors and writers from The Union, as well as informed community members. Contact the board at EditBoard@TheUnion.com.

<https://www.theunion.com/opinion/our-view-fire-should-be-our-first-priority/>