

Wildlife Impact Overview

US Forest Service: Burning the West on Purpose



**Killing Millions of Wildlife and Destroying Air, Water
and Habitat for Future Generations**



Introduction

The intentional practice of US Forest Service (USFS) created methods of starting, expanding, and steering fire operations across the Western United States kills millions of living things each year, including people, animals, birds, fish, and wildlife. This destruction extends to many square miles of communities and habitat for humans and wildlife alike.

Evidence shows the out-of-control USFS policy of growing fires to “restore fire to fire-depleted ecosystems” often results in firestorms and burned acres far beyond anything previously recorded in California and across the 11 Western States. The tragic

effects of these ongoing, intentional burn operations - day after day, month after month, year after year - result in far-reaching damage to our air quality, water and watershed environments, life-sustaining habitats, and wildlife. Government agencies setting intentional fires in our pristine forest lands is among the greatest tragedies and on-going threats of our time.



This intentional practice is causing wildlife and domestic stock to die like the people of Pompeii long ago, as millions of animals are frozen in place, burned alive, as they try to escape in the searing white heat of fire. For wildlife and livestock that do escape direct fire, pain and suffering await them as their paws and hoofs are burnt from scathing coals and/or as they suffer for days and weeks from becoming asphyxiated from the thick ground level toxic smoke and become stressed because of a lack of food or water after their habitat is destroyed.

Recent examples of intentional fire growth since 2021 directly and adversely impacting the Lake Tahoe Basin include the Dixie, Caldor, Tamarack and Mosquito Fires, which cumulatively burned a staggering 1,330,569 acres. The Caldor fire burned into forests of the Tahoe Basin. Toxic smoke from this fire caused air quality levels to rise for weeks into

the dangerous air quality category as residents, visitors and wildlife choked on the noxious poisonous gases and harmful ash particulates. These fires deposited carcinogenic carbon black, phosphorus, nitrogen, and fine sediment particles into the natural waters of the Sierra, including the Jewel of the Sierra Nevada, Lake Tahoe, which is classified by the EPA as “impaired” due to excessive deposits of phosphorus, nitrogen, and fine sediment, the same elements found in burning forest smoke.



A deer lies dead in the aftermath of the Dixie Fire (Getty Images-Bloomberg) (Reproduced with permission to TahoeCleanAir.org)

Additionally, any protections offered by the Clean Water Act designating Lake Tahoe Waters as an "Outstanding National Resource Water" are virtually ignored by the USFS allowing intentional degradation of Lake Tahoe Waters to continue on an unchallenged glidepath. The intentionally grown Caldor Fire caused massive resident evacuations, hospitals to be overwhelmed with heart-lung emergencies, while bears wandered through residential

neighborhoods in South Lake Tahoe. This, along with other impacts, all contributed to an irrevocable sense, that everything had changed for the worse.

60 minutes You Tube Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEjWfLPpQwY>

Years ago, when fire agencies decided to help wildfires play a “more natural role” in land management, the clock started ticking for the shores and degradation of the waters of Lake Tahoe, the watersheds that feed her and the surrounding forests within the Sierra Range. Human life, wildlife and Lake Tahoe clarity have become the victims of failing environmental policies, poorly conceived and executed.



Injured black bear eventually euthanized - 2021 Caldor Fire. SFChronicle photo

Unlike wildfires in past centuries of human history, today's new intentionally grown mega-fires are utterly destructive to habitat across millions of acres of parched forests.

When living things begin to pioneer new homes in their former territories, the elements that allowed them to succeed are gone. The combination of land, water, and vegetation is no longer suitable or sustainable.

Compounding the epic tragedy of these fires is the new reality that wildlife are often caught between smaller controllable wildfires and **government-created fire growth** tactics. These intentionally grown fires, now lit with fire-drone strikes miles from the main fire, commonly increase fire size and destructive power beyond imagination.

As an example, the .25-acre Pole Creek fire in Utah grew inexplicably and exponentially to 120,000 acres as firefighters implemented new fire policies claiming that more extensive fires are safer for firefighters and better for the environment.



Wildlife Disaster Network veterinarians treat the burned paws of a mountain lion. (Photo courtesy of CDFW)

Most troubling, intentional fire for "restoration" policies flowing from federal firefighting agencies have never been subjected to the rigors of a National, open, public planning process as required by law. The government intentional fire model does not meet the basic requirements of administrative or substantive laws, including the National Environmental

Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act.

Out here in the West, the Sierra Nevada Range forests are home to 60 percent of California's animal species. Over one-third of those species are listed by the U.S. Department of Fish and Wildlife as rare, threatened, or endangered.



A bear, injured in a wildfire, rests with its badly burned paws wrapped in fish skin - tilapia - and covered in corn husks during treatment at the University of California, Davis. (CDFW)

Agencies have not disclosed the cumulative effects on wildlife from their intentional burning. They have not incorporated the data from other scientific studies and expert testimony about whether widespread fire-drone strikes truly constitute sound land management policy and practice. Further, property and resource damage in the billions of dollars continues, with no compensation for those damaged by government action or inaction. Additionally, protecting wildlife is rarely if never mentioned during these purposely grown fires.



Tamarack Fire - (US Forest Service/Twitter)

This purposeful manmade burn campaign, harmful to all life, including unsuspecting residents of America's Wildland Urban Interface, continues under the guise of "firefighter safety" and "resource management."

In reality, this practice has turned into an out of control, government-run budget infusion mega business with no end in sight. And sadly, contains elements of a **potential fraud**, running up local, State and Federal budgets to administer an act that ignores negative impacts to human health, public safety, safe drinking water and clean air laws already on the books. This then, effectively robbing citizens and communities, including children, pets, the elderly, and people with heart-lung health diseases, of their right to life and equal protection under the law.

What does this all mean to Lake Tahoe's pristine water clarity.

Intentionally grown fire impacts are having tragic atmospheric and direct impacts on our water clarity, including adverse chain reaction impacts on our aquatic ecosystems, dependent on the food web.

Two key source documents, the UC Davis 2022 State of the Lake Report, and the University of Nevada's, "Nevada Today", discuss impacts on Lake Tahoe waters from recent USFS led regional fires, all of which started outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Although these source documents do not discuss USFS fire growth tactics, Lake Tahoe Basin impacts from these fires are discussed.

As an example, recent Caldor fire impacts are discussed in the University of Nevada in "Nevada Today" from September 23, 2021, which states:

"18 of California's 20 largest recorded wildfires have taken place in the past 10 years, the impacts of which have become increasingly relevant to the Tahoe Basin... "The researchers found thick layers of black ash from the Caldor Fire on the shores of Lake Tahoe".

Link here: <https://www.unr.edu/nevada-today/about/journalists>

Many of the lowest forms of organisms have the most impact on Lake Tahoe's once-crystal-clear aquatic environment. It's no longer acceptable to overlook the immediate and long-term effects of increased purposely grown fires on water-dependent sun-sensitive organisms including these UC Davis observations:

- *Phytoplankton, forming the base of the food web, are subsequently changing their distribution at an unprecedented rate. In 2021, phytoplankton moved closer to the surface as summer (and smoke from fires) progressed. The shift may be due to reduced sunlight and ultraviolet radiation during wildfire smoke events.*

<https://www.ucdavis.edu/climate/news/tahoe-state-lake-report>

- *For the first time, the Lake Tahoe's dominant alga was the cyanobacteria *Leptolyngbya*, a species favored by the high nitrogen in wildfire smoke.*

<https://www.ucdavis.edu/climate/news/tahoe-state-lake-report>

The Pyrocene Paradox:

The intentional wildfire growth paradigm ignores boundaries, is blind to competing or mutually beneficial animal, property, and vegetation management objectives, and is unmoved by, and unaccountable for, negative impacts to human health and safety, wildlife, property rights and civil responsibilities.

USFS Fire Commanders are often self-taught to use the false flag of firefighter safety for justification of their destructive process. This is an excuse that is neither safe nor supportable, a relic of the persistent failure to build informed consent and analyze all impacts before purposeful wildfire growth. This development should give everyone pause as public safety, protection of private property and vast forest resource protection, wildlife habitat protection, and sustainable water clarity are not included in the equation.

Firefighter safety is important but has become a go-to trump card in the myopic view of fire leadership, regardless that proven time and again, catastrophic firing operations decisions can and do kill people, destroy property and lay waste to wildlife and habitat.

This dominant paradox begs for resolution through honest, open communication and a legal planning process. Instead, USFS fire leadership has doubled down on their personal and professional commitments to the intentional fire growth paradox.



Entire herds of wildlife and cattle died in the Bear Fire of 2020. Dave Daley photo

In the end, wildlife and wildlife habitats are burned beyond the ability of current models to predict reasoned outcomes. Vegetative type conversions of native species are the result of landscape high-intensity fire which are increasingly common across the West. Entire forests and all the succession of trees, from seedlings to Old Giants, are dying in the current fire regime.

The prospects for recovery of many sensitive and threatened species and their habitats remain dire.

Conclusion

US Forest Service intentional fire growth policies have significantly escalated since 2000 and are resulting in out-of-control giga fires, and in addition to tragically wiping out wildlife communities, are killing civilians and impacting individual health and safety. Further, these intentional fire growth policies wiping out clean air and dangerously impacting western states water quality and clarity, including that of Lake Tahoe, of which the adverse effects are often beyond easy or probable recovery.

While not all wildfires are assisted by fire agencies to the same degree, intentional USFS wildfire growth has however increasingly become the norm.

As a final example, and there are many, the growth of many recent fire cyclones were highly influenced by US Government firefighting policies and practices, including direct lighting of fires that were dying. Regardless of whether or not wildfire ignitions are human caused, the US Forest Service has dramatically accelerated the number of acres burned, using “unplanned fires” to achieve their forest management policies. The 2020 North Complex also serves as a textbook case of fatal and unaccountable fire policy run amuck.

Many independent variables affect wildfire impacts outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin. However, intentional wildfire growth is the one factor most subject to human control.

Finally, the complete failure to transparently quantify and qualify the massive wildlife and habitat losses from intentional wildfire growth policies, speak to the truth, that accurate wildlife impacts under current fire policy are never revealed to the public.

There are flames behind the smoke, and those flames are killing massive numbers of valuable wildlife, ruining all habitats, releasing toxic smoke and ash including carcinogenic carbon black, phosphorus, nitrogen, and sediment, which degrades air quality, health, and water clarity, and diminishing the quality of life of all residents and visitors within the Lake Tahoe Basin, its adjacent forests, the Sierra Range, and Western United States forests.

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During Frank's 31-year career with the U.S. Forest Service, he served as a hotshot squad boss, assistant fire management officer, strategic planner, public affairs officer, and command staff officer on national fire teams. Frank has partnered with other foresters, arborists, natural resources, and wildfire effects professionals at PFMc since 2007. Frank earned his Master's in Public Administration, Natural Resources and the Environmental Policy from Boise State University, and completed three years of graduate study at the University of Idaho in fire science and fire ecology.

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Ron is President of Primero Conservation.org with 50 years in State, Federal and private wildlife conservation, and management, including team membership on Type I fire teams. His career transformation from a firefighter to a wildlife biologist has informed him of the good - and the bad - of wildfire management. Ron works as a consultant employee for Wildfire Pros.

This Wildlife Impact Overview was prepared for:



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