

A National Emergency: Lack of Forest Maintenance Resulting in Destructive Wildfires¹

A *Call to Action*



“...Putting all fires out immediately is very cost effective; large fires are unimaginably expensive and destructive. On average, total economic losses can range between 15 to 30 times direct suppression costs. So, at this point in time, it is critical to put all fires out quickly with an aggressive Initial Attack. The losses in life and land from wildfires are completely unacceptable. It does not have to be this way. A *Call to Action* is required now. Please help!”

Sign-on to the *Petition* [Petition Link: <http://chng.it/bGsyZvSb>]. As of February 15, 2022 there are 5,142 signatories for this *Call to Action*. In 2021, 8 million acres were destroyed by wildfire. As of this update, another 54,170 acres have been already burned in 2022; again, it's just February. The fire season never stops. Help make a change.

¹ Prepared by Michael T. Rains with comments included from a wide-range of professionals; 47 and counting. This summary paper has been updated as 2/15/2022 11:11:03 AM.

A National Crisis: Lack of Forest Maintenance Resulting in Destructive Wildfires

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Summary

In 2001, there was a “Call to Action” of sorts. It was called “Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment” -- the *National Fire Plan*. Then, the Administration and Congress banded together. The *National Fire Plan*, while certainly had its flaws, served the country pretty well. Now it is time for a new “Call to Action.” It has been drafted with the help of 47 professionals [and counting] who are incredibly skilled – over a thousand years of combined experience – in controlling wildfires to save lives and property. It is now time for a new “Call to Action.”

The current version includes five basic parts:

- National Emergency Commitment.
- Statement of Intent [an example].
- Vision.
- Strategy.
- 10-Year Plan of Work.

“... These are different times. With the current land conditions and the impacts of a changing climate, the notion of allowing a fire to burn anywhere, for whatever reason, for the foreseeable future, is unacceptable and must be stopped now; no exceptions.”

Lately, there seems to finally be a developing awareness that the lack of forest maintenance [forests are more than just trees] and destructive wildfires are linked. Yet, the proposed legislation and press releases and various statements are not well focused. We have a *Call to Action* in place that establishes the requirements for change. Let’s reconfirm the logic we need to address:

Keeping Fires Small *Logic Sequence*



Forest Maintenance Helps Keep Fires Small:

- ✓ Small fires = less risk to firefighters and the local citizenry:
 - Putting all fires out immediately is very cost effective; large fires are unimaginably expensive and destructive. On average, total economic losses range between 15 to 30 times suppression costs. So, for the foreseeable future, it is critical to put all fires out immediately with an aggressive Initial Attack.
 - The concept of “managed wildfire”, for now, is simply an intellectual argument with mostly disastrous results:
 - Keeping fires small = saving valuable watershed values, including critical habitat for wildlife;
 - Keeping fires small = fewer smoke pollutants impacting nearby communities, as well as the firefighters themselves:
 - Well trained leaders at the local level = the best utilization of resources to keep fires small.

A National Emergency

In 2001, there was about 38 million acres of our national forestlands classified as high risk to fire. It is now about 90 million acres. Why? Because for three decades, we have significantly underfunded forest maintenance work that could restore the health and resiliency of our landscapes and help prevent large, intense wildfires. By shifting money *from* sustainable forest maintenance actions *to* fire suppression, today's forests have become overgrown and act like tinderboxes.

How do we break the cycle?

We solicit an aggressive commitment – *A Call to Action* -- from leaders² across America to legislate and properly fund forest health maintenance work that creates and maintains a mosaic of vegetative stages that are productive and more resilient to catastrophic wildfire. By restoring the health of our landscapes, we break the cycle and help reduce the horrific destruction that these wildfires level against public health, infrastructure, and natural resources.

It's a Tie for the Top Spot

Large, high intensity wildfires throughout America – especially in the west – have created this national crisis. The three primary reasons are, with a tie for the top spot:

1. Lack of forest *maintenance*
1. The impacts of a changing climate.
3. The expansion of the Wildland-Urban Interface

We must address all three.

The 2022 Fire Season:

The 2021 fire season is over. During the 2021 fire season, about 8 million acres burned. It is February 2022 and already about 54,000 acres have burned; far more than last year at this point in time. But it's so much more than just acres burned. People are dying from fire and smoke, along with countless wildlife and domestic animals. Towns and communities are being wiped away. Stories of loss and grief are gut wrenching. Current activity indicates the 2022 fire season will be just as destructive as last year; probably more. And, when we review the current and proposed budgets, they are status quo budget in terms of forest maintenance. Simply put, nothing is going to change unless we become strong advocates for expanded forest maintenance that enables healthy, resilient forests. Through legislation, funding and the optimization of our wildfire suppression strategies, we can dramatically decrease the threat of large, destructive wildfires.

² On August 4, 2021, USDA Secretary Vilsack talked about the positive impacts of forest management and his commitment to emphasize the care of our forests. [USDA chief calls for overhaul of forest management in western states | Courthouse News Service](https://www.courthousenews.org/usda-chief-calls-for-overhaul-of-forest-management-in-western-states/)

Top 10 Actions

The current “Call to Action” calls for “Top 10 Actions” that must be deployed now and for the foreseeable future:

1. In all probability, the 2022 fires season will be more destructive than last year and the COVID-19 pandemic and the new variants will still be with us. We must understand this and act accordingly or thousands of people will needlessly become ill or die.
2. The concept of “managed fires” must be taken off the table for now; no exceptions. **This is key.**
3. The goal is to put out every fire immediately upon detection. Reduce response time by 80 percent!
4. Smoke is also a killer. We must keep it to a minimum.
5. More fully utilize smaller, more agile aircraft and helicopters. They come with much less people needed to effectively operate, thereby reducing the COVID-19 risk profile.
6. Use larger aircraft more in a more appropriate role.
7. Fully utilize smokejumpers and other specialized firefighters to augment Initial Attack.
8. Pre-position resources much better than ever before. The current mantra needs to be: **“Strive to be close to the incident, react quickly and put all wildfires out immediately.”**
9. Seek added funds. Estimates are as much as +\$5.5 billion annually for at least 5-7 years.
10. We must do all we can to keep people safe and well. This is a National Emergency, let there be no doubt.

Critical Steps:

- **Behave very differently** to remain safe.
- **Keep all fires small** and put them out immediately; reduce smoke.
- **Keep the focus on forest maintenance**, the ultimate “brass ring.”

Key Components of the Current “Call to Action” [rev. 12.1]: February 15, 2022] includes:

- Smoke is Also a Killer
- **Caution:** A “Fire Fix” is Not a “Forest Fix”
- Lack of Forest Maintenance That Halts Resilient Vegetative Mosaics
- Reduction in Hazardous Fuels
- Biomass Uses
- Be Fire Wise and Safe
- Improved Aerial Fire Suppression Tactics

The Latest “Call to Action”:

For the latest update of the “Call to Action” and its full text, please send a request to mtrains7@verizon.net.