

FIRE MANAGEMENT ON FEDERAL LANDS: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How does climate change and drought affect fire management? Scientists are largely in agreement that rapidly changing climatic conditions and enduring drought are leading to longer and more destructive fire seasons in the West.¹ This emerging information is critical to developing sensible and cost-effective fire management plans that ensure human safety while recognizing the futility of attempting to suppress all fire. As we prepare for mega-fire seasons, how can we most efficiently protect lives, structures and resources?
2. Aren't firefighting costs exploding? There is little doubt among scientists that climate change and drought will lead to longer fire seasons and higher-intensity fires. Suppressing all fire is no longer an option. Fire Management Plans provide the public an opportunity to rein in the exploding costs of suppressing 98% of all fire on national forest lands. There are more efficient strategies for managing fire on public lands and funds must be directed at protecting communities and ensuring the safety of firefighters. The federal government and the states are currently engage in a discourse over who should be responsible for the growing costs of fire fighting.²
3. What do fire management plans have to do with democracy and government transparency? NEPA provides Americans one of the most fundamental means of practicing democracy and participating in decisions affecting our national forest lands. The Fire Management Plans dictate where and when fires will be put out, where they will be employed to effectively manage fuels, and how much money will be spent on fires. The public and non-federal government agencies have a right to engage in this process and through NEPA determine how effectively and efficiently their tax money is being spent by the federal government: basic government transparency.
4. How can fire management plans affect firefighter and community safety? We can't fireproof forests, but we can fireproof and safely defend communities. Fire management plans should determine where firefighters can safely suppress fires and defend human communities and residents should have some influence on where limited funds are going to be spent suppressing fire.
5. What science should fire management plans incorporate? Western forests evolved with fire; fire is as important to these forests as rain is to a rainforest. When we suppress 98% of fires, we are depriving forests of a life force that renews and restores. Further, fire is the most cost-efficient tool we have to manage forest fuel buildup in a time when funds are extremely limited. Sound forest management requires scientifically justified fire management plans.

¹ See New York Times. March 27, 2007. *Heat Invades Cool Heights Over Arizona Desert*. By Timothy Egan; Christian Science Monitor. April 5, 2007. *Surviving a Warmer World: Global Forecast is 'Mostly Dry.'* By Peter N. Spotts.

² See E&E Daily, January 31, 2007, *Forests: Senators, Bush Admin Say Growth Partially To Blame For Fire Costs*. By Dan Berman; Also see New York Times, January 3, 2007. *As Costs of Wildfires Grow, So Does a Question: Who Should Pay?* By Kirk Johnson; And see Denver Post. April 3, 2007. *Flame-plagued Summers in Forecast*. By Katy Human.