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## Harvesting Trees Will Prevent Fires

By: H. Sterling Burnett

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While wildfires, per se, are entirely natural, the size, intensity and harm caused annually by the past decade's forest fires are almost entirely of human origin: federal mismanagement of our national forests are to blame.

The U.S. Forest Service [estimates](#) that more than 190 million acres of public land are at risk of catastrophic fires, including 60 percent our national forests. Too many trees, too much brush, and bureaucratic regulations and lawsuits filed by environmental extremists are to blame. [Timber harvests](#) have plunged more than 75 percent from 12 billion board feet per year to less than 4 billion board feet per year. [The result](#): historically large ponderosa pines which grew in stands of 20 to 55 trees per acre now grow (and burn) in densities of 300 to 900 trees per acre.

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Twenty years ago, a wildfire exceeding 100,000 acres was deemed to be catastrophic. Today, such large-scale fires are the rule rather than the exception. [For instance](#), in 1998 there were 81,043 wildfires, burning 1,329,704 acres; but in 2007, 85,705 fires burned 9,328,045 acres. In 2011, 74,126 fires left 8,711,367 acres in cinders – below 2007's amount but still well above the average.

The fact is excessive fuel, and thus the fire hazard, can be reduced in three ways. First, is to use mechanical thinning of vegetation and logging. Second, is to use small “controlled” burns which, the [Los Alamos fires](#) of 2000 taught us, are inherently risky unless there has been some logging of the site before the fires are set. Failing to choose one of these options leaves only the “burn, baby, burn” result that we are currently witnessing.

Our forests, those who live near them, those who fight the fires, and the public who use the forest and pay the bills, deserve a forest policy that places public safety, environmental health, economic well-being and fiscal responsibility above the flawed ideal of “letting nature take its course,” held by powerful environmental lobbyists and the legislators and bureaucrats who crave their support. It's time for the government stop fiddling as our forests burn, and tend to the public good. It must increase and expedite logging, especially in forests where more standing timber is dead or dying than growing and limit court challenges of forest management plans. Let the logging begin!