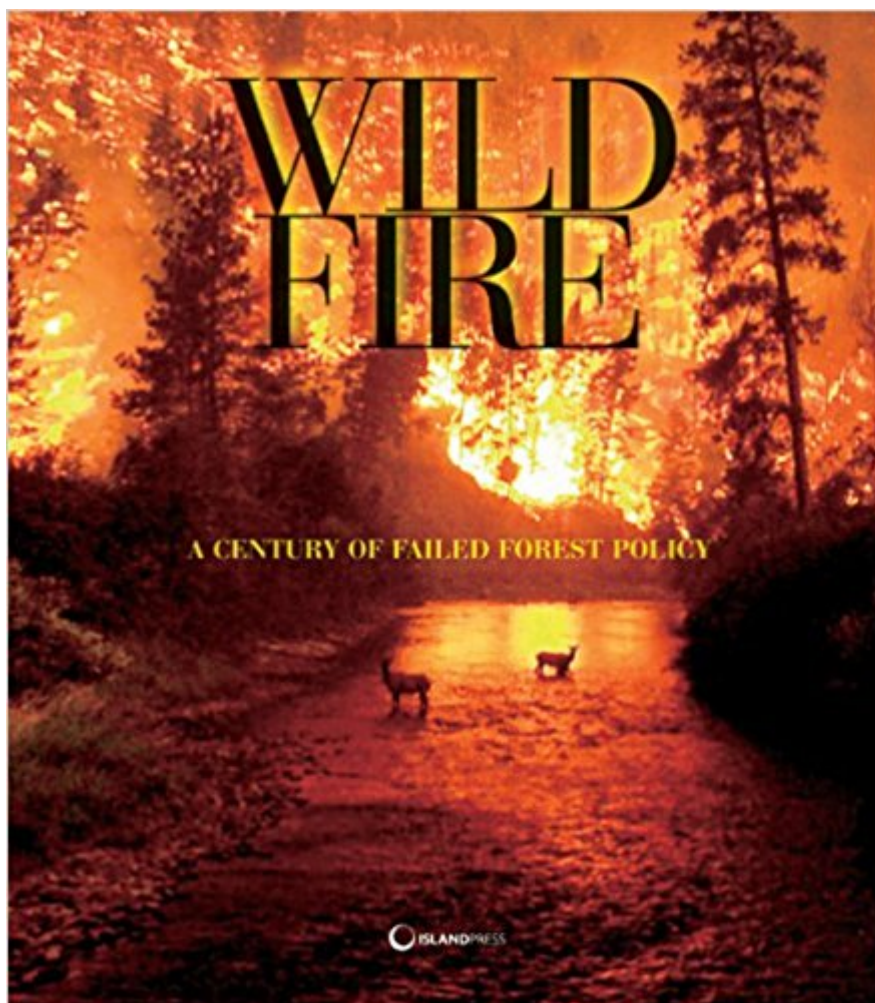


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The Wildfire Reader: A Century Of Failed Forest Policy



Synopsis

Wildfires are an awe-inspiring natural phenomenon that have shaped North America's landscapes since the dawn of time. They are a force that we cannot really control, and thus understanding, appreciating, and learning to live with wildfire is ultimately our wisest public policy. With more than 150 dramatic photographs, *Wildfire: A Century of Failed Forest Policy* covers the topic of wildfire from ecological, economic, and social/political perspectives while also documenting how past forest policies have hindered natural processes, creating a tinderbox of problems that we are faced with today. More than 25 leading thinkers in the field of fire ecology provide in-depth analyses, critiques, and compelling solutions for how we live with fire in our society. Using examples such as the epic Yellowstone fires of 1988, the ever-present southern California fires, and the Northwest's Biscuit Fire of 2002, the book examines the ecology of these landscapes and the policies and practices that affected them and continue to affect them, such as fire suppression, prescribed burns, salvage logging, and land-use planning. Overall, the book aims to promote the restoration of fire to the landscape and to encourage its natural behavior so it can resume its role as a major ecological process.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Editor George Wuerthner is a professional photographer and the author of more than two dozen books on natural history and other environmental topics. He is currently the ecological projects director for the Foundation for Deep Ecology.

Contrary to Smokey T. Bear, fire is an integral part of healthy ecosystems. The biggest problem with wildland fire is suppression, not burning. After a century of aggressive fire suppression and the myth of Smokey T. Bear, we now see clearly that fire is integral just as soils, sun, wind, water, insects, snow, ice and other natural processes. Put an increment borer into a tree and you can read the fire history of an ecosystem back up to 3,000 years. Core into soils, meadows and adjacent streams and you can often retrace almost 10,000 years of fire history in the sediments, buried logs and stumps. Learn the behavior of wildland fire in the presence of sun, upslope wind, rain, snow, clouds, humidity, katabtic winds and air temperature and you begin to catch a glimpse of how we have artificially imposed politics, wishful thinking and pseudoscience on wildland ecosystems. Media and politicians speak of "catastrophic" and "charred" ecosystems, but fail to speak of the catastrophe of sprawling urban development imposed upon fire-maintained vegetation and soils. We live in wood houses with wood shake roofs and wonder why our houses burn when the surrounding air super heats. We have made many mistakes with fire. The first mistake is labeling wildland ecosystems uninhabited "wilderness". As Kat Andersen reminds us in "Before The Wilderness," this was never wilderness, people have always lived here AND used fire as a tool to maintain healthy ecosystems for more than 10,000 years. It was the European invasion that labeled fire as "bad" and Disney and Bambi who drove the message home. It is only through the dedicated work of scientists and wildland managers in places like Sequoia-Kings Canyon, Yosemite and Yellowstone Natl Parks since 1970 that we have begun to understand the basic role of fire. The Leopold Commission in the early 1950s clearly identified the potential for large fires from all the biomass that was and continues to build up. There is still a large residue who label fire as "bad," and don't understand the role of fire in healthy, resilient, durable ecosystems. Air Quality districts now impose their mandates on when to burn. This book is a must for the public, resource managers and urban residents.

Good enoght

Overall a very good collection of essays which cover a broad range of wildfire issues. Authors of different expertise offer thoughtful analysis of topics such as fire ecology, the role of fire suppression, logging, and the politics involved in fire suppression. These issues are becoming even more important now with the changing climate and fire environment. Sadly, the bitter rants of editor George Wuerthner and pal Andy Kerr damage the credibility of the book. Their black and white opinions and extreme attitudes are emblematic of the polarization of American politics. I have

been fighting wildfire for 10 years and share many of their frustrations, but am surprised at their naivete and hatred towards the firefighting community (which, like all aspects of society, contains aspects of good, bad, and everything in between).

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