

Liar, Liar, Brush on Fire.

Legislators in Washington used the recently extinguished fires in Southern California to help garner support for the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HR 1904). They claimed the Act would have helped prevent the terrible loss of lives and homes by allowing the Forest Service to thin forests and remove dangerously high fuel loads that have accumulated after over 50 years of ill-advised fire suppression. (Turns out Smokey the Bear was a fool...)

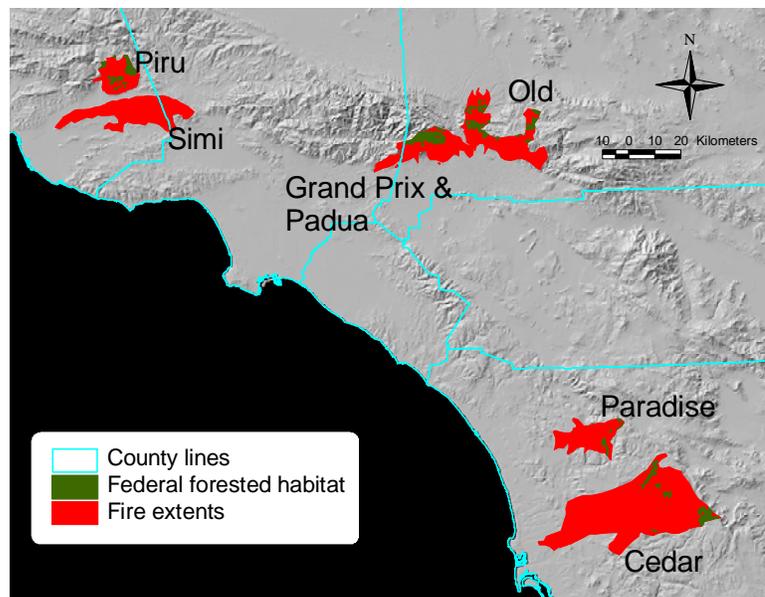
Neat idea, except the legislators are flat wrong. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act may help prevent future fires in some areas, but it clearly would have done very little in Southern California. The facts are indisputable:

HR 1904 only applies to federal land; it has neither jurisdiction nor influence on state, county, or private land. Over two-thirds of the area burned in S. California was on non-federal land. Available evidence also suggests that most or all fires ignited on non-federal land.

HR 1904 is designed primarily to help thin forests; brush and chaparral habitats are unlikely to be substantively affected by the plan because they lack trees big enough to lumber in mills to help defray costs of thinning efforts. A whopping 85% of the fires in S. California burned in non-forested habitats.

All told, the Healthy Forests Restoration Act would have affected less than 10% of the area in the S. California fires.

Any thinning in this meager proportion of the burned area would have had a negligible impact on the fires sweeping through non-federal, non-forested terrain.



Politicians should not exploit Southern Californians who lost their lives, homes, and property to drum up support for legislation that needs additional scrutiny. If HR 1904 should be made into law, its proponents must argue for it on its own merits, and not on the backs of wildfire victims.

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