

Calaveras Enterprise

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Who is blocking what?

Three area supervisors blamed the Sequoia fire, and fires in the West generally, upon "self-anointed radical preservationists" who use "countless appeals and lawsuits" to prevent the Forest Service from conducting "sensible forest management, such as reasonable efforts to thin forests of underbrush and excessive fuels" [Letters, Aug. 13].

It seems to be in season to lay responsibility for fires at the feet of conservationists.

Conservationists do not oppose reasonable efforts to thin forests of underbrush and excessive fuels. For example, after the fires in Arizona this June, Sharon Galbreath, executive director of Southwest Forest Alliance in Flagstaff told the press, "We haven't appealed a single thinning project underway in three national forests in Arizona because they all propose removing trees that are 9 inches or smaller in diameter."

In July, the Forest Service issued a report identifying 326 "mechanical fuel treatment projects" nationally on its drawing boards in 2000 and 2001, and said 48 percent of those had been appealed and 6 percent litigated. The gist of the report was that the Forest Service had to operate with one hand tied behind its back.

But on closer examination, many of those projects were commercial timber sales, not aimed primarily at fire prevention. In fact, most of the named projects did not qualify for funds specifically designated by Congress for fuel reduction.

Last year the General Accounting Office identified all the Forest Service projects in 2001 that were funded from the \$205 million that Congress allocated specifically for fuel reduction.

The GAO found 1,671 projects. Of those, 20 had been appealed, and none litigated. In other words, of the more than 1,600 projects actually aimed at fuel reduction and fire prevention, only one percent were challenged.

The "countless appeals and lawsuits" are easy to count: 20 appeals, no lawsuits, in 1671 instances.

No cabal of "self-anointed radical preservationists" is obstructing fire prevention. Conservationists share with loggers, the Forest Service and the public the awareness that we need to thin and clear forests and conservationists support projects actually aimed at that goal.

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