

Wildfires spark climate, forest management and austerity debate

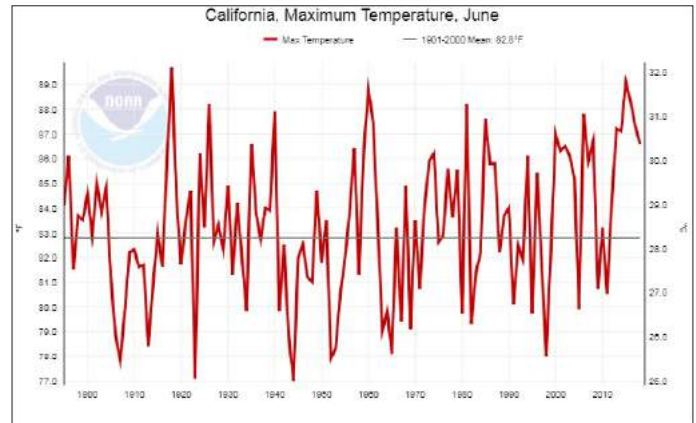
By Jeremy Beck

Recent wildfires in Greece, Sweden, California, and New South Wales have seen much of the establishment media point to “climate change” as the overriding problem. But the evidence tells a different story. In fact, Europe as a whole is seeing fewer hectares consumed by wildfires in 2018 than normal, compared with the average over the last decade. While this year more than 21,000 hectares (ha) of forest has burned in Sweden, at the start of the 19th century, around 250,000 ha of forest in Sweden burned every year. In California, legislation preventing proper forest management, including President Obama’s major 2012 rewrite of forest rules, has resulted in a build-up of fuel load which is clearly to blame for the severity of the present fires. Official US temperature and precipitation data identify no alarming trends. Similarly in NSW, current climatic conditions are not unprecedented and historians know that bushfires have raged in August several times before.

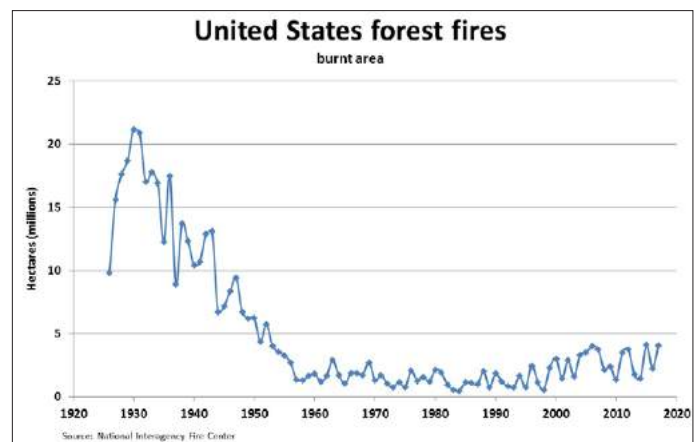
Imagery of infernos and a drumbeat of climate-change warnings makes for good propaganda. This will alarm some, but rational thinkers understand there is other cause for alarm. Many lives are at risk from insane forestry mismanagement imposed by extremist “green” legislation. Paul Driessen, well known for his 2003 book *Eco-Imperialism: Green Power, Black Death*, wrote of this fire-management issue in a 30 July 2016 *Townhall* column: “densely packed, water- and nutrient-starved trees—skinny matchsticks waiting for a spark—are far too common in our western [US] states, because land mis-managers refuse to thin the trees. The resulting fires are not the ‘forest-rejuvenating’ blazes of environmentalist lore. They are cauldron-hot conflagrations that exterminate wildlife habitats.... Areas incinerated by such fires don’t recover their arboreal biodiversity for decades.”

Driessen is an important critic of “environmentalist” forest management, being a former member of the Sierra Club and the Zero Population Growth movement (a.k.a. Population Connection). He writes on his website, “the environmental movement had become intolerant in its views, inflexible in its demands, unwilling to recognise our tremendous strides in protecting the environment, and insensitive to the needs of billions of people who lack the food, electricity, safe water, healthcare and other basic necessities that we take for granted.” Likewise, Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore states in a review of Driessen’s book: “The environmental movement I helped found has lost its objectivity, morality and humanity. The pain and suffering it is inflicting on families in developing countries must no longer be tolerated. *Eco-Imperialism* is the first book I’ve seen that tells the truth and lays it on the line. It’s a must-read for anyone who cares about people, progress and our planet.”

“In short”, Driessen said, “whatever ‘hotter, drier, longer’ forest fires we are witnessing today have nothing to do with ‘dangerous manmade climate change’. They have a lot to do with idiotic forest-mismanagement policies and practices. Far too many environmentalists, bureaucrats, politicians and judges would rather let forests burn, than let anyone selectively cut timber, thin out overgrown trees—or even let loggers harvest usable timber left from beetle kills.... Eco-purists want no cutting, no thinning—no using fire retardants in ‘sensitive’ areas because the chemicals might get into streams that will be boiled away by conflagrations.



Official temperature records for California show up the lie that climate change is a significant factor. Source: NOAA



Wildfires in the United States have decreased remarkably over the last century, but “green” policy threatens to undo all of this progress.

They prevent homeowners from clearing brush around their homes, because it might provide cover or habitat for endangered species and other critters that will get incinerated or lose their forage, prey and habitats in the next blaze.”

Most Californian fires this season started in June and July, and several are still burning. The summer has been hot and dry, but National Oceanic and Atmosphere (NOAA) records do not identify a state-wide maximum heat record. California’s maximum monthly temperature for June occurred in 1918 (89.7 °F, 32.1 °C), while seven of the top ten highest June temperatures occurred between 30 to 100 years ago. The June 2018 value (86.6 °F, 30.3 °C) has been surpassed in 15 other years. July 2018 was very hot (94.3 °F, 34.6 °C) ranking at number 2 behind the 1931 record (95.6 °F, 35.3 °C), but was some of this atmospheric heat a product of the fires themselves? NOAA precipitation records for California identify several dry months in 2018 but nothing particularly exceptional.

European fires

The media tell us that firefighters in Sweden have faced their worst bushfire season ever. True enough, but previous generations witnessed fires burning out an area more than tenfold that of the 2018 fires just about every year. Then Sweden successfully employed good forest management including prescribed burning, which rapidly increased from the 1920s until the late 1950s. Prescribed burns reduce fuel load and encourage regrowth in a controlled way.

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In 1958 Sweden burned 17,400 ha of state forests, but in recent decades this proven practice has all but ceased. In 2015 only 977 ha were burned, which has been typical for recent years. Of the 30,536,000 ha of forestland in Sweden, over the 2011-15 period prescribed burning totalled only 6,141 ha or on average just 0.004 per cent of forestland per year. Sweden is one of the world's biggest exporters of paper, paper pulp and wood products, but its market share is declining as poor forest management and radical environmentalism take over.

In Greece, tragically this season's fires have claimed 96 lives. While some blame "climate change", the official World Meteorological Organisation's European temperature record stands at 48 °C, and was recorded in Athens in 1977. European Union data shows that Greece has seen, if anything, a downward trend in area consumed by fire from 1980 to 2016. While Greece is now seeing devastating fires, other countries which often suffer such events aren't seeing any. Overall, as at 21 August, wildfires in Europe have burnt 113,000 ha whereas the 2008-17 average to this date is 196,000 ha.

Even some members of the nominal "left wing" of politics see the absurdity of just blaming "climate change". As Yanis Varoufakis, former finance minister of Greece opined in *The Globe and Mail* on 26 July: "Greece's post-war economic model relied on anarchic, unplanned real estate development anywhere and everywhere. That has left us, like any developing country, vulnerable to deadly forest fires in the summer and flash floods in winter (just last winter, 20 people died in houses built on the bed of an ancient creek). That collective failure is, naturally, aided and abetted by the Greek state's perpetual lack of preparedness: its failure to clear fields and forests of accumulated kindling during the winter and spring, for example, or to establish and maintain emergency escape routes for residents. Then there are the usual crimes of oligarchy, such as the illegal enclosure of the coast around seaside villas for the purpose of privatising the beach. Eyewitness-

es I spoke to said that many died or were badly injured struggling against the barbed wire that the rich had put between them and the sea."

Though he did blame climate change as a contributing factor, Varoufakis also called out the role of EU-mandated austerity in the ineffectiveness of Greece's fire response. "Fire departments, citizens' protection agencies, ambulance services and hospitals are terribly understaffed. ... it is unquestionable that over the past decade, the troika of Greece's official creditors—the European Commission, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund—has actively deprived the Greek state of the resources and capabilities it needs in such situations."

Green death trap

A 2013 paper "Bushfire Death Trap—The Eltham Gateway" by Tim Malseed and bushfire expert David Packham makes for essential reading to understand the insanity of "green" land management and the real potential for thousands of deaths in leafy suburban areas near bushland. The authors point out that had the East Kilmore bushfire (near Melbourne) continued its predicted passage into the Eltham Gateway on Black Saturday, 7 February 2009, thousands could have been killed and in excess of 100,000 people traumatised. Many would have died from radiant heat, stuck in their cars in traffic jams on tree-lined roads. The paper made 12 recommendations including reducing the fuel load in all areas, to less than 5 tonnes per hectare. Malseed informed the *Australian Alert Service* that Victoria's Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley could not refute anything in the paper, told the authors he would respond, but never did. The government has ignored all 12 recommendations and Malseed says the situation now in 2018 is worse given the fuel load and additional population in the area.

It's time to reject "scientific" mumbo-jumbo from radical environmentalists, and go back to proven forest- and land-management practices.