

Forest Fire Cover-ups July 30, 2002

Memo to Michael Coughlan:

Thank you for your rebuttal on my views as to why we are experiencing heretofore unprecedented major forest fires. Only one factor has changed in the century-old history of forest management and that alone is responsible for the predicament we face. Political correctness and blind ideologists now dictate the management.

Consider ideologists such as Chad Manson, the highly paid executive director of the John Muir Project and a national director of the Sierra Club. I read his views on the subject in the June 27 issue of the *Watertown Daily Times*. It was headlined “Logging Practices Worsen Fire Risk.” Would he be one of the “land managers and scientists” you refer to who have attributed the wildfire “problem” in the American Southwest to “past forest management practice”? Much of your rhetoric on the subject follows his guidelines and offers living proof he does the job well he is paid the big money for.

You also state in your letter that “wildfire suppression in the West has done more harm than good.” Your premise, of course, is based on the view of the enviro crowd that it’s all natural and we will all be better off letting fire, insects, and disease exhaust one of the most valuable resources the country is blessed with. Who in their right mind would believe it’s a better use than the jobs and wood products that are derived from a truly healthy well-managed stand?

You put forth only one true factual observation in your statement, “While it is true that commercial logging might reduce the severity of forest fires...”

Columnist Richard Lowry made some observation on the subject that I concur with. Harvesting on Forest Service lands went from 12 billion board feet in the late 1980’s to roughly 3 billion board feet – and falling – today. He points out that environmental groups have wiped out the timber industry in the West, principal among them the Sierra Club. They use the vast network of federal regulations – foremost among them the Endangered Species Act – to tie up any attempts at harvesting in lawsuits. Their preference is clear – forced to choose between forests with chain saws or with massive infernos, they’ll take the infernos every time. Burn, Baby, burn.

Michelle Malkin lends a whole other aspect to the scenario – lost lives. Last summer four young firefighters died at the Thirty-Mile Fire in Washington State’s Okanogan National Forest. One of the young men’s mother, Barbara Weaver, had this to say about her son Devin’s death:

“Their lives were taken from them. They were not out there trying to save somebody’s life. They were led down a dead-end road and sat there to do nothing – that’s the story”.

Indeed, the inferno had raged for more than a day; it didn’t suddenly “erupt”. Trapped firefighters waited for more than nine hours for water to be dropped while bureaucrats dithered over concerns about endangered species in the water supply. Four young men died in their emergency fire shelters as the fires swept over them, while the bureaucrats dithered.

An awful lot of smoke was generated by the fires in question, but not nearly as much as was generated by the Sierra Club and the Forest Service attempting to cover up the real causes.

The once-proud Forest Service, for which I once worked, has become a shell of its former self and has degenerated into just one more politically correct social experiment gone awry.

Michael, in spite of your protestations that you're not driven by blind ideology, I believe the following adage applies in your case: "There are none so blind as those who refuse to see".