

# Why California's Costly (and Destructive) Logging Plan for Wildfires Will Fail

by DOUGLAS BEVINGTON 5/24/19 <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/05/24/why-californias-costly-and-destructive-logging-plan-for-wildfires-will-fail/>

California's current approach to wildfires is pouring more and more money into subsidizing logging and fire [suppression](#), often in remote areas. This strategy isn't working. In recent years we have experienced skyrocketing state expenditures for this policy, paired with unprecedented loss of lives and homes.

California is filled with forests and other ecosystems where wildfire is a natural and necessary occurrence. Many California communities are built next to these habitats. Rather than trying to alter wildfire behavior across millions of acres of fire-dependent ecosystems, wouldn't it be more sensible to focus on keeping fire from coming into our homes where it doesn't belong?

This can readily be achieved by retrofitting homes to have fire-resistant features such as non-flammable roofs and vent screens that keep burning embers out, while trimming vegetation within a 100-foot radius. The Leonardo DiCaprio Foundation has described this approach as "working from the home outward."

This approach has proven to be highly effective, such as during the 2017 La Tuna Fire in Los Angeles, where community preparation saved more than 99% of the houses in the path of a large wildfire. However, many communities are not properly prepared, and currently California is not putting enough resources into ensuring that the necessary retrofits are made.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has an opportunity to guide California's wildfire policies toward a new strategy that prioritizes working from the home outward. Upon taking office, Newsom ordered CalFire to produce new recommendations for state wildfire policy. Unfortunately, CalFire is a state agency long entrenched in a logging-and-suppression approach, and its recommendations doubled down on business as usual, with more than \$100 million per year directed to tree-cutting and related activities.

Interestingly, the CalFire report briefly acknowledged the effectiveness of fire-safe homes, but then didn't recommend directing any funding for that purpose. What was perhaps most striking about the report was that it made no attempt to ask the crucial question: Which actions would produce the biggest public safety benefits per dollar spent? That analysis would show [home](#) retrofits offer the most effective and cost-efficient way to protect our communities from inevitable wildfires.

There are some positive signs of greater attention on working from the home outward. Another recent fire policy report ordered by the governor included some discussion of home retrofits (but again did not compare which actions produce the greatest safety benefits). And during a recent speech in the [East Bay](#), Newsom touted a new app with information about home safety steps. However, his revised state budget allocates nothing for a proposed fund to help homeowners take these steps.

To quote the famous movie line, "Show me the money." When will California allocate significant resources to help communities implement these needed home fire-safety retrofits? The money is available, but it is instead currently being steered mainly toward old-strategy actions such as more tree cutting.

For example, California received \$70 million of federal housing funds for community wildfire safety, and the state is now directing that money to cut down ecologically important habitat created by the 2013 Rim Fire in remote national forest lands far from any communities. Wouldn't those funds be better

spent helping fire-affected communities such as Paradise rebuild in fire-safe ways?

By focusing state resources on directly preparing communities to safely coexist with fire-dependent ecosystems, Newsom can save lives and homes, save taxpayers' money, and generate home-retrofitting jobs in a new strategy that is also more ecologically appropriate. To achieve this change, he should look for guidance beyond the people who have championed the old approach.

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