

Opinion: Fire tax for rural areas is a good idea

Publisher's note: *This editorial is from the July 24, 2011, Sacramento Bee.*

If people choose to live in areas prone to wildfires, shouldn't they pay their fair share for the escalating costs of protecting their structures from inevitable infernos?

The answer should be a simple "yes," but state lawmakers didn't make it part of the budget until this year. That's when they approved a \$150 annual fee on 800,000 structures that sit within the vast acreage where California has firefighting responsibility.

In tight budget times, this fee will raise revenue to ensure that the state's firefighting capability isn't excessively cut back, putting rural residents in danger.

Yet that argument doesn't wash for Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville. Attempting to make himself out as a caped crusader for taxpayers, Gaines has filed papers for a referendum to eliminate the fee.

Gaines claims the fire fee isn't a legitimate fee but a tax, and as such should have been subject to a two-thirds approval from lawmakers, instead of a majority vote.

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