

Science: Controlled burns help prevent larger fires



A controlled burn on Spooner Summit in 2014.
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By Francie Diep, Pacific Standard

In the right forests, one important way to prevent large fires is to let small ones burn. That's the conclusion of recent research into wildfires, which has found that small, controlled fires remove dry brush that would serve as fuel to mega-fires if allowed to build up.

In addition, moderate fires can nourish the soil and germinate the seeds of plants evolved to work with wildfire. (Lodgepole pinecones = real-life dragon eggs.)

If you're from California, or live in another region that's prone to wildfires, you may already know this. Researchers and forest managers know it too. A quick search finds a number of official documents that talk about the importance of removing brush, setting off controlled "prescribed fires," and letting small wildfires burn far away from buildings. This is a major departure from the common practice of the recent past, when nobody cleared brush and firefighters put out all forest

fires. researchers now acknowledge such habits set the stage for the large, out-of-control fires of today.

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