

What Calif. can learn from how the South manages wildfires



The Marina Fire near Mono Lake is one of several currently burning in California. Photo Copyright 2016 Carolyn E. Wright

By Laura Bliss, CityLab

There are three things that give him joy in life, says Johnny Stowe: “Beer, my grandkids, and fire.”

Not a campsite fire, or a house fire, but fire that Stowe prescribes and manages across the wild lands of South Carolina. As a heritage-preserve manager for the state’s department of natural resources, Stowe works with crews to set ablaze predetermined swathes of land around the state, carefully burning off undergrowth with low-intensity flames along carefully planned control lines. Every year, in winter and spring, on days when the weather and wind are just right,

Stowe lights up thousands of acres this way. He loves every minute of it.

Each year, according to the U.S. Forest Service, roughly 8 million acres of land are treated with prescribed fire in the Southeast—more than in all other U.S. regions combined.

A chorus of ecologists is calling on more of the U.S. to emulate the Southeast's fire-friendly ways—especially California, where catastrophic wildfires over recent summers have captured national attention. This year, the state's wildfire season arrived earlier than ever, and with a vengeance.

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