

Opinion: Will Calif. ever let Sierra forests burn?

By Andrew C. Revkin, New York Times

In this centennial year of the National Park System, it's been encouraging to see management of the western components of this remarkable ecological patrimony shifting ever so slowly toward incorporating knowledge of natural cycles of fire in maintaining forest health. For forests in California's Sierra Nevada, particularly, a dangerous and ecologically disruptive "fire deficit" has been built through generations of land policies fixated on fire suppression.

In early June, I was fortunate to see an all-too-rare prescribed burn while spending several days in Kings Canyon National Park.

The problem?

It took 13 years to carry out this one 760-acre planned fire. The state's stringent air quality rules add vast regulatory obligations to planned a managed fire but don't apply if the same area ends up burning on its own – as would be inevitable.

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