

The West can learn about forest fires from Fla.

By Kyle Dickman, *Outside*

Fire has always been a part of the landscape. The mistake we made was trying to stop it—something Florida never did.

Joe O'Brien, a research ecologist with the U.S. Forest Service, tucks his helmet into his chest, steals a breath of clean air, and steps closer to the fire now engulfing a \$23,000 camera. Overhead, a drone that sounds like angry bees is darting in and out of the smoke column. A flock of nearby scientists are radioing to each other as they drag a boxy gadget on a pulley through dancing flames.

O'Brien is one of several dozen scientists who traveled from around the country to a half-acre plot of longleaf pine forest north of Tallahassee, Florida, for the privilege of burning it all. He and all the scientists here are trying to answer the complex and poorly understood question of how fire burns. If they succeed, they hope to set more of America ablaze.

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