

Nature study recommends new approach to wildfire management

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A new study in the journal *Nature* suggests that wildfires be treated like other natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, where officials focus on adaptation and loss mitigation as opposed to prevention and response. The federal government currently spends billions of dollars each year fighting and controlling wildfires; up to half of that expense is spent defending homes and structures built in fire-prone areas. Development in these areas has increased since this strategy was implemented because the federal government has demonstrated its willingness to protect public and private structures in these areas.

The study's authors, who are from the U.S., Australia, and Spain, suggest reframing wildfire mitigation as a land-use issue. In the same way that building codes and insurance policies are tailored for structures in earthquake-prone areas, the authors recommend the government incentivize building "fire-wise" homes in less hazardous areas. In extreme cases, development could even be restricted. The study states that these kinds of changes could decrease fire suppression costs and property loss, as well as encourage healthier ecosystems. Without structures to protect, wildfires could be allowed to burn, maintaining forests' biodiversity and natural processes.

Sources: E&E News, Moritz et al., Learning to coexist with wildfire. *Nature* 515, 58-66 (2014)
