

National Wildfire Alliance Calls for Immediate Wildfire Policy Reset – California Globe

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Dana Tibbitts

California wildfires. (Photo: fire.ca.gov)

The National Wildfire Alliance (NWA) is in full swing as the early fire season gears up across the 11 Western States. Spokesperson Dana Tibbitts said the NWA's priorities include advocating for sensible wildfire policy: extinguishing all fires during fire season through aggressive initial attack, reducing fuels, salvaging dead trees, replanting burned forests, and protecting communities.

“We’ve had enough of letting wildfires burn—and deliberately making them bigger—and enough of watching public and private property go up in smoke,” Tibbitts said. “A decade of unilateral, scientifically unsound fire policy has led to ruin and heartbreak. It’s time to put the fires out and build resilient, fire-ready communities and forests.”

“When wildfire policies result in dead and blackened forests, they’re doing it wrong,” said Bill Derr, NWA president and a veteran U.S. Forest Service fire and law enforcement officer.

Derr noted that U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz and U.S. Wildland Fire Service Chief Brian Fennessey have committed their agencies to wildfire suppression and fuels management. Chief Schultz has stated his intention to aggressively suppress all wildfires and restore active forest management to living, sustainable forests.

“Fennessey is focused on rapid and immediate fire suppression across Department of the Interior lands,” Derr said. “Firefighters must be fully focused on wildfire suppression during the busy part of wildfire season,” a Forest Service spokesman recently wrote. “Prescribed fires ... are critical to reducing wildfire risk and remain our focus outside of peak wildfire season.”

Derr criticized the practice of “managing naturally occurring wildfires”—agency terminology for allowing fires to burn or intentionally expanding them, as occurred during the 2025 Laguna Fire in New Mexico.

He said the policy has killed hundreds of cattle, vast numbers of wild animals—including 54 bears in the Caldor Fire—contributed to 16 civilian deaths in Berry Creek, California, in 2020, and been used as justification for official arson.

Several million-acre fires have cost more than \$150 million each to fight and destroyed centuries of forest growth, he added.

Frank Carroll, NWA vice president and chief forester for Professional Forest Management in Pueblo, Colorado, said Schultz supports reducing wildfire risk through fuel-reduction efforts. But Carroll warned that what agencies call “potential operational delineations” (PODs) — which he describes as a “license to burn down the house” — are failing in practice.

PODs are intended to serve as landscape fire boundaries defined by roads, rocky ridges, and other natural features. While they can help contain fires, Carroll said fires that start within PODs are often allowed — and even encouraged — to burn through the use of drone ignitions and drip torches. The results, he says, have been widespread destruction, fire escapes, and the catastrophic loss of forests and communities.

He pointed to the recent Billy Fire on the Tonto National Forest in central Arizona. The fire began within a small section of a POD but ultimately burned thousands of acres of old-growth pine forest, isolated patches of critical desert wildlife habitat, and rare refugia for both wildlife and people. Carroll said firefighters intentionally retreated to flat ground, resulting in the loss of 300 years of forest habitat and important grazing land supporting local ranchers.

“These ill-considered, counterintuitive, and highly destructive federal wildfire policies have got to stop,” Derr said. “We don’t need another Berry Creek, Dixie Fire, Telegraph Fire, or Caldor Fire to know it’s not working.”

Derr added that Chiefs Schultz and Fennessey are working to change agency direction and refocus firefighters on what they do best: putting fires out.

In agencywide guidance issued in January for 2026, Chief Schultz wrote that his wildfire priorities are “to protect lives, property, and forests.” He said the agency will “double down on wildfire readiness and rapid response via aggressive, coordinated response to keep fires small,” while focusing investment on interagency coordination, contract and infrastructure capacity, staffing resources to address year-round fire conditions, and strengthening communities through partnerships and effective planning.

Schultz also emphasized reducing wildfire risk “by increasing prescribed fire and fuel treatments.” There is no mention of “managed wildfires” — a notable omission that Derr credits to a decade of effort by NWA members and others working to influence and reform federal wildfire policy. They maintain that living forests are the measure of sound forestry and wildfire management.

National Wildfire Alliance (NWA) is an independent organization advancing research, transparency, and accountability in wildfire policy, land management, and community safety. NWA provides fact-based analysis to help journalists, policymakers, researchers, and community leaders navigate complex wildfire issues with clarity. Learn more <https://www.nwasolution.org>. Empower people. Protect forests. Restore trust.

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Dana Tibbitts is an author and investigative journalist focused on wildfire risk, evacuation safety, and public accountability. Co-founder of the Tahoe East Shore Alliance, and Advisor to the National Wildfire Alliance, Dana co-authored *Harnessing the Sky*.

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