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Review: Flames in Our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?

By Stephen F. Arno and Steven Allison-Bunnell

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Stephen F. Arno and Steven Allison-Bunnell. *Flames in Our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?* Washington DC: Island Press, 2002. 227pp. ISBN 1-55963-882-6 (cloth); ISBN 1-55963-883-4 (paperback) US\$45.00 cloth; US\$19.95 paperback. Alkaline paper.

"Fire has shaped western forests for thousand of years" (p. xi), it is a natural part of the life cycle of western forests, and active management of wildfires should lead to healthy and sustainable forests. These are the main premises of this book. Stephen Arno, a retired forest ecologist, has studied the effects of fire and the use of prescribed fire and fuel reduction treatment. Steven Allison-Bunnell is a science writer and educational multimedia producer who specialize in natural and environmental history. They have collaborated to write a non-technical book about the story of fire in the western forests of the United States in order to offer a better understanding of what has happened over the last hundred years, when people have tried to suppress fires, as compared to previous centuries when fires spread naturally. They show how the fires of the past have shaped the western forests and how the fire suppression of the past century has changed the character of the forests. They point out that even these "natural forests" have been shaped by man. The Native American and the timber man in previous centuries used fire to shape the forest to meet their needs. Fire suppression has led to a change in the forest types with the introduction of trees other than those that were historically dominant in a particular area. Inland Douglas fir, Western hemlock, and white fir have replaced ponderosa pine, sugar pine, white pine, and larch. Different kinds of forests burn differently and require different management strategies. Arno and Allison-Bunnell recommend the use of prescribed fire and fuel treatments for different zones in the landscape. They say, "we now have the technical knowledge to manage forests to reduce wildfire hazards and to restore many of the ecological benefits associated with the natural fire regime" (p. 135).

In this well-researched book Arno and Allison-Bunnell let the reader in on some of the detective work, explaining how forests can be examined for clues to their past and ancient stumps can be read for their histories. They explain how fires behave and how they affect the environment (earth, air, water) and creatures (including human) that live in and near the forests. In the chapter on management of wildland fuels around homes, they discuss the problem of homes built in forested areas and provide invaluable

information about what the homeowners can do to make their homes safer from wildfires. An appendix that supplements this chapter gives addresses and phone numbers of government and private organizations throughout the west.

Arno and Allison-Bunnell recommend that we need to actively manage forests through the use of prescribed burning and restoration forestry to maintain ecological values of the forests and land. They end the book with an appropriate quote by George Hoxie, a California timber man, who wrote in a *Sunset* article in 1910 that "we had best adapt fire as our servant. Else it surely will be our master" (p. 182).

The text reads smoothly with embedded notes referring to the excellent bibliography. Subheadings in the table of contents and an extensive index make information easy to locate. This well-written book provides good reading for anyone interested in western forests, their environment, ecology and great beauty; or for someone who owns a home or land in a forested area. It will make a valuable addition to academic or public libraries, especially those with collections in environmental and ecological studies and forest management.

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