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# Salvage logging is first step to recovery after fires

Explosive wildfires threaten public safety and the environment in California

Removing dead trees is an important strategy that also helps the economy

A forest left to heal itself turns into brush that fuels more fires

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*Special to The Bee*

As California nears the end of another devastating wildfire season, it's important that we understand the comprehensive nature of wildfire and how it impacts our forests.

Although fire has always been an important part of the Sierra Nevada, the [explosive fires we see today](#) pose a significant threat to public health and safety, air and water quality, and to wildlife habitat. In the past 15 years, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of acres burned, as well as the severity of these fires.

A [2012 study](#) found that wildfires are burning at a higher intensity – killing the trees and seed source, sterilizing the landscape and creating soil that lacks the ability to absorb water. These combined effects inhibit natural regeneration and increase erosion into critical watersheds.

Unfortunately, these facts are our new reality. As politicians argue about funding fire prevention vs. suppression, the issue still remains that our forests need immediate attention to encourage their recovery after devastating fires.

One important strategy used in recovery efforts benefits both the environment and the economy. Referred to as “salvage logging,” forest owners remove hazardous dead trees and recover the burned logs to recoup a fraction of the lost timber value, which is then reinvested into restoring a thriving forest.

Removing dead trees is the first step toward recovery and is just one of the many tools that landowners use to restore a burnt forest. In a carefully planned effort, professionals retain a percentage of dead standing trees to enhance wildlife habitat and forest diversity. They also provide necessary protections in and around streams to prevent soil erosion and sedimentation, which is crucial since 60 percent of our state's water supply originates in the Sierra.

Once trees are removed, landowners will prepare the forest floor for planting by breaking through the hydrophobic soil and allowing for a healthy, diverse and more resilient forest to grow. Well-managed planted forests **can capture carbon** at rates as much as 400 percent greater than their unmanaged counterparts.

This varied landscape fosters a plethora of wildlife. Animals such as the Northern and California spotted owl, if not killed in the fire, often move while foraging for food. Within a few decades, these regenerated forests provide excellent nesting habitat for owls, as well as hundreds of other species. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the real threat to wildlife is wildfire itself, not recovery efforts.

The **Environmental Defense Fund** says that “letting nature heal itself won't work in these circumstances and instead will result in a landscape dominated by brush for decades” and agrees that “removing a responsible proportion of (dead trees) ... will not compromise ecological health.”

With responsibly planned restoration efforts, we'll see an ecologically diverse forest that is once again home to a diversity of species and age classes, in just a few decades. In contrast, a forest that is left to heal itself turns into brush that serves as fuel for future forest fires, and often takes a century or more to fully recover. Which would you prefer?

*David Bischel is president of the California Forestry Association, the statewide trade association of forest owners and forest product producers.*

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