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Two federal laws were “delegated” to all states for enforcement: the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act. The states could make them MORE stringent but not less stringent. The issue here is the air act. California has made them more stringent, which is why you have “California autos” that meet CA air pollution standards and “49-state cars” that meet the regular (less strict) Clean Air Act standards. The California Air Resources Board- CARB - enforces the Clean Air Act. Then there is both NEPA and “see-qua” or CEQA, the California Environmental Quality Act, more stringent than and in addition to NEPA. Every time we tried to do a prescribed burn (in Yosemite) we could rarely get permission (only 25% of the time) from CARB to burn the burn piles (from mechanical thinning) or to ignite a prescribed burn. And, when we DID get permission it was always for a smaller amount. We would ask for a 1500 acre prescribed burn and get only 300 or 500 acres.

If you remember, we would have burn piles in the Valley sit for two or three years! And those were burned in the winter, in snow! But winter weather causes inversions and smoke doesn't easily dissipate. So again, CARB ruled.

ALL those proposed burns had to go through an environmental assessment, or EA, and often the public objects to cutting (for burn piles). Why? Because many think, in a national park “thinning” is equivalent to “logging.”

Between trying to do “mechanical” removal of fuels (resulting in burn piles) and the public outcry, and prescribed burns prohibited by CARB, we never could get ahead of the increasing fuel load. Thus, the result was, when a wildfire occurs - it burns big.

Yosemite is one small, half million acre park. Multiply that by all the national forests, BLM, other national parks, and state forest lands across California, and there is no way to erase a century of suppression which only continues to build up fuels. Trees live, but also die and when they do, they dry up and fall to the ground.

Remember, the whole West - western landscapes - are “fire-dependent” ecosystems. The general public doesn't understand, for example, that sequoias, Ponderosa and lodgepole pines, and Douglas firs only sprout seeds after a fire.

Thus, these forests evolved over millennia from fire, and they must, and will, burn!
I always would say in public meetings, “It's ALL going to burn some day; we might as well burn it when we have a chance to control it rather than have it burn it uncontrolled.” I think people who live in forest landscapes in Montana, Alaska, Idaho and other parts of the West have a better understanding of all this. But California has a huge urban population and even if they do understand, it's easier to “blame the Feds!”

So, yes, it's mostly Federal land but if the State won't allow controlled burns or cutting - including logging, on US Forest Service or BLM lands, it sets it up to “it will all burn some time.”

The short answer is, other states allow logging, prescribed burns, and removal of beetle killed trees. Some will ask, what about global warming? That has been occurring since the last ice age and will continue at some rate, but is continuing. The answer is that you must thin and prescribed burn, even MORE! Some will say, but what about wilderness? Well, you can have wilderness but where forests are near development or communities, the only way to “manage” them is to reduce fuel loads, one way or another. Some will say, but the natural ecosystem in a Park needs tree decay for healthy soils, bacteria to decay wood, cavity trees for birds, etc. Yes, it does - and national park employees are experts at knowing where to manage natural forests that are near developed areas and communities, but sometimes the public believes they can have their cake and eat it too!

Not just Californians, but many people seem to believe they can have un-cut Fire-dependent forests that shouldn't burn, and should never be cut. But, that belief only continues to build up fuel loads, and then they are surprised when forests burn as wildfires and turn into conflagrations. Wild land federal managers try hard to use best management practices- but the public outcry over the solutions and lawsuits don't always allow “professionals” to do what's best for forest management. And, to add insult to injury, those same professionals have to listen to the blame that “it's the Feds fault!”