

BOOK REVIEW

Living with Fire: Fire Ecology and Policy for the Twenty-First Century. 2008. By **Sara E. Jensen** and **Guy R. McPherson**. University of California Press, Berkeley, USA. 180 pp. Cloth. US\$32.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-520-25589-0.

In *Living with Fire*, Sara Jensen and Guy McPherson explore the complex, and uncomfortable, intersection of today's fire policy, fire science, and fire management. They consider the perceived wildland fire "crisis" to be a result of the media deluge presenting a bleak view of wildfires destroying the beloved American West. The public is confronted with the impression that there is a crisis and that must be solved to make our forests and people "fire-safe." *Living with Fire* is a thought-provoking book that is not intended to solve the dilemma of our current wildland fire situation but to frame it in way that incorporates the complexities of fire science, policy, communication, information, and land management within our society's view of fire policy and management.

The authors are clear that *Living with Fire* is designed to make the critical knowledge on wildland fire available in an understandable form to non-experts. Chapter one is a very brief and generalized overview of the ecological setting behind the main fire issues in the western United States. It recognizes the important and complex role that fire plays in western ecosystems. The second chapter explores historic changes in the predominant land management paradigms, how they influenced fire's role, and why they no longer represent current direction. Chapters three and four provide critical assessment of the policy of fire exclusion and how we have carried the concepts of fire exclusion forward into current fire management efforts.

The final two chapters call for explicit restatement of management goals based on managing land for the public good, emphasizing ecosystem values with less focus on protection of private property, and utilizing restoration of

fire over mechanical treatments for fuel reduction. The authors consider current fuel management efforts to be an over-emphasized part of fire management, emphasize the importance of reintroduction of fire as a normal part of wildland ecosystems, and consider fire suppression to be an inherently harmful effort that can no longer be seen as a default function of the federal agencies.

Living with Fire is an interesting read and does a commendable job of articulating the current fire management situation in the western states. The authors' assertion that the next paradigm in fire policy and management will focus on restoring fire's role in ecosystems while de-emphasizing private property values will require changes in the public perception of fire. *Living with Fire* is an effort to articulate, structure, and initiate that effort.

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