‘WE DIDN’T USED TO HAVE THESE KINDS OF FIRES.’ LOGGER BLAMES POOR FOREST MANAGEMENT »

BEHIND THE ‘WILD WEST’ OF SCHOOL REOPENINGS »

BOOK: TRUMP SAID OF VIRUS, ‘I WANTED TO ALWAYS PLAY IT DOWN’ »
Loggers blame politicians. Politicians blame climate change. President Donald Trump claims that California doesn’t know how to manage its forests. While the finger-pointing goes on, Mother Nature doesn’t care. California has set a record with 2 million acres burned this year, and the Creek Fire rages on. Moreover, what is typically the worst part of the wildfire season is just beginning.

Trump signed an executive order in 2018 in an effort to help manage forests better in hopes of alleviating fire danger. Are forests any better for it? Those that intimately know the terrain after years of driving its dusty logging roads say the order was too little, too late. Those in academia that study fires don’t think logging alone can solve the problem. They finger climate change. And, the state of California just recently took a step to reshape how its forests are managed. Meanwhile, Valley loggers are putting their skills toward firefighting now.

Current Logger
“They’ve not managed the forest in any way, shape, or form,” says logger Jon Jackson. “There’s billions of board feet of timber that’s been dead up there for 10 to 20 years.” Jackson has been logging the area for 30 years. “I blame bureaucratic liberals,” says Jackson. “It’s a political ballgame.” Jackson says Southern California Edison has proactively maintained its private forestland. He says in the last five years, he’s helped SCE take out many dead trees. The utility company then uses controlled burns to clear them out. Jackson says he’s approached the U.S. Forest Service about doing more in the area and offered to help clear dead and dying trees. “The response you get? It (no) comes from upstairs,” said Jackson, referring to the federal government. GV Wire℠ asked Jackson if President Trump’s executive order in 2018 did anything to help spur more logging and thinning of the forest. “It was too little, too late,” said Jackson. Jackson said that the only working sawmill in the area in Terra Bella isn’t sufficient to process the number of felled trees.

Retired Logger
Allen Jackson, who is Jon’s uncle, logged the Creek Fire area for 46 years. “We’ve loved our forests to death,” Allen Jackson told GV Wire℠ by phone. He’s referring to the U.S. Forest Service, the Sierra Club, and politicians advocating for tree preservation over forest management for decades. “We took a hands-off approach after the Clinton administration,” said Allen Jackson. “We didn’t used to have these kinds of fires.” He estimated that in the area of the Creek Fire there are probably between 800 to 900 trees per acre. “It should be about 200 trees per acre,” Jackson said. Since he’s...
Residents, churches, businesses, and nonprofits across the Valley are opening their hearts — and their homes, pastures, parking lots, kitchens, and computers — to help the nearly 12,000 people who have had to flee their Sierra homes because of the Creek Fire.

Churches, in particular, are stepping forward to provide a haven and services to those in need, but the desire to help out seems to be universal. Clovis Christian Church is taking turns with other Clovis churches to cook, package, and deliver about 100 breakfasts, lunches, and dinners daily for people at shelters such as the Red Cross shelter at Clovis North High School/Granite Ridge Intermediate School on North Willow Avenue in Fresno, senior pastor Cameron Unruh said.

“We could pay to have food delivered, but my people are saying, ‘How can we help?’ ” he said. “People are so hungry to help — they want to do something.” An outpouring of donations of food, water, and other items has arrived at the doors of area churches, many of which are also throwing open their parking lots to evacuees who arrive with an RV or trailer. One such church is Clovis Christian. Unruh said one family that had to flee the flames had no place to stay until someone dropped off a fifth-wheel trailer at the lot...
An academic year in which public education will intersect with public health has created back-to-school shopping lists unlike any other for California’s schools as they attempt to transition toward in-person instruction once they have the state’s blessing. Bakersfield’s Panorama-Buena Vista Union School District plans to hire a manager to handle contact tracing for a system of 19,000 students and 4,000 employees. Anaheim Union High School District spent more than $500,000 this summer on additional band instruments so students won’t have to share clarinets, saxophones and flutes to reduce risk of spreading the coronavirus.

Among the few California schools to physically reopen, Yreka Union High School District near the Oregon border is spending about 10% more than it would in any given year to hire more maintenance staff to support exhaustive cleaning efforts. While an overwhelming majority of students began the year in distance learning, schools are preparing for that moment, sourcing personal protective equipment for teachers and kids in a competitive market, figuring out how they will trace coronavirus cases and test employees, and wondering just how far their dollars will stretch this year. The laundry list of safety measures schools are spending on is due to new state public-health requirements they will have to abide by for in-person learning, and mounting pressures to bring students back to campuses to help stop widespread learning loss and revive a sputtering state economy.

Doing that will require safety precautions to help prevent coronavirus outbreaks and give parents, students, teachers and staff enough confidence to return in person. The exact costs related to health and safety measures depend on how much of the year schools will offer in-person instruction. That amount of time is in turn tied to local health conditions and, school officials say, whether they will have enough money in their budgets to sustain it. This summer, Gov. Gavin Newsom’s Office of Emergency Services procured a 60-day supply of protective equipment for the state’s 1,037 school districts, anticipating that campuses were going to physically reopen to begin the new term. Order forms of the $53 million shipment obtained through a public records request partially illustrate the scale and cost attached to reopening schools for the...
MASSIVE SMOKE CLOUDS, THICK AIR DARKEN WESTERN US SKIES

September 9, 2020 | AP News

SAN FRANCISCO — People from San Francisco to Seattle woke Wednesday to hazy clouds of smoke lingering in the air, darkening the sky to an eerie orange glow that kept street lights illuminated into midday, all thanks to dozens of wildfires throughout the West.

“It’s after 9 a.m. and there’s still no sign of the sun,” the California Highway Patrol’s Golden Gate division tweeted, urging drivers to turn on their headlights and slow down. Social media was filled with photos of the unusual sky and many people complained their cellphone cameras weren’t accurately capturing the golden hues. Despite the foreboding skies, there was little scent of smoke and the air quality index did not reach unhealthy levels. That’s because fog drifting from the Pacific Ocean was sandwiched between the smoke and surface.

Meanwhile, smoke particles above the marine layer were only allowing yellow-orange-red light to reach the surface, said Ralph Borrmann, a spokesman for...
WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump seemed to understand the severity of the coronavirus threat even as he was telling the nation that the virus was no worse than the seasonal flu and insisting that the U.S. government had it totally under control, according to a new book by journalist Bob Woodward. “You just breathe the air and that’s how it’s passed,” Trump said in a Feb. 7 call with Woodward. “And so that’s a very tricky one.

That’s a very delicate one. It’s also more deadly than even your strenuous flu.” “This is deadly stuff,” the president repeated for emphasis. Trump told Woodward on March 19 that he deliberately minimized the danger. “I wanted to always play it down,” the president said.

The Washington Post, where Woodward serves as associate editor, reported excerpts of the book, “Rage” on Wednesday, as did CNN. The book also covers race relations, diplomacy with North Korea and a range of other issues that have arisen during the past two years. The book is based in part on 18 interviews that Woodward conducted with Trump between December and July. The book is an unwelcome return to focus on Trump’s handling of the pandemic just as he is trying to project the virus as under control and eager to see a return to normal activity leading up to the Nov. 3 presidential election. “Trump never did seem willing to fully mobilize the federal government and continually seemed to push problems off on the states,” Woodward writes. “There was no real management theory of the case or how to organize a massive enterprise to deal with one of the most complex emergencies the United States had ever faced.”

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said the president’s words to the public were designed to express confidence and calm at a time of insurmountable challenges.

Woodward’s Book Is His Second on the Trump White House

“The president has never lied to the American public on COVID. The president was expressing calm and his actions reflect that,” McEnany said. McEnany took questions about the book during a briefing at the White House on Wednesday. She said his actions reflect that he took COVID-19 seriously. She noted that the president put in place travel restrictions with China on Jan. 31 and that some Democrats had criticized the move.

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DESPITE JUDGE’S ORDER, PLANS BEING MADE FOR CENSUS LAYOFFS

ORLANDO, Fla. — Even though a federal judge ordered the U.S. Census Bureau to halt winding down the 2020 census for the time being, supervisors in at least one California office have been instructed to make plans for laying off census takers, according to an email obtained by The Associated Press.

The email sent Wednesday from a field manager in California instructs supervisors to rate the census takers working under them with letters “A,” “B,” and “C.” Those getting a “C” rating will be the first terminated during the next round of layoffs, according to the email which doesn’t say when the cuts will take place.

Census Bureau spokesman Michael Cook said no directive to make such ratings has been made from headquarters or the six regional offices across the country. Census officials planned to follow up with the local offices to make sure they understood the...
BEIRUT — A huge fire broke out Thursday at the Port of Beirut, sending up a thick column of black smoke and raising new panic among traumatized residents after last month’s catastrophic blast at the same site killed nearly 200 people. It was unclear what caused the blaze at the facility, which was decimated by the Aug. 4 explosion when nearly 3,000 tons of ammonium nitrate blew up and sent out a shock wave that caused widespread damage and was felt as far away as the island of Cyprus.

Dark smoke covered the capital on Thursday as army helicopters sprayed water over the orange flames leaping from the ground. The Lebanese army said the fire started in the port’s duty free zone at a warehouse with containers of tires, oil and other flammable materials. Panicked residents — still struggling to recover from last month’s explosion — cracked open windows and called and texted each other to warn them of the new danger. Local TV stations said companies that have offices near the port asked employees to leave the area. Some hid in bathrooms, while others dropped what they were doing and rushed home.

The Aug. 4 explosion killed 191 people, injured about 6,500 and damaged thousands of buildings. The explosion, the single most destructive blast in Lebanon’s history, is blamed on government negligence and mismanagement. There was speculation in Beirut that Thursday’s fire could be an attempt to destroy evidence from the explosion. Port director Bassem al-Qaisi told Voice of Lebanon radio the fire started in a warehouse where barrels of cooking oil were placed and later spread nearby to where tires were piled. “It is too early to now if it is the result of heat or some other mistake,” al-Qaisi said adding that the black smoke was from burning tires. The panic was compounded by the fear that more chemicals could be in the wreckage of the port. Earlier this month, the army said it discovered more than...
NEW FIRE BREAKS OUT IN CROWDED REFUGEE CAMP ON GREEK ISLAND

September 9, 2020 | AP News

ATHENS, Greece — Fire struck again Wednesday night in Greece’s notoriously overcrowded refugee camp on the island of Lesbos, a day after a blaze swept through it and left thousands in need of emergency shelter. The fires caused no injuries, but they renewed criticism of Europe’s migration policy.

Wednesday night’s fires broke out inside the parts of Moria camp that had not burned in the first blaze, sending people streaming from the camp with their belongings, according to an Associated Press photographer in the area. Later, about 4,000 migrants who had left the camp for the island’s main port of Mytilini to board ships for the mainland threw stones at police blocking the road, and officers responded with tear gas, police said. There were no reports of injuries or arrests. Police said migrants also lit fires in fields near the site of the clashes.

Moria had been under a coronavirus lockdown when the first fire gutted a large section of it, and health officials said some of those who had tested...