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Chico, California: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lrYW0cNnL8A>

Smokejumpers, "Managed Wildfire," and the Northwest Forest Plan

I say, from the public standpoint, I think Chico, in Northern California, is a wildfire center of the wildfire capital of the world.

To the west of us we've had a million acres burned on the Mendocino. To the east of us, another million on the Plumas [National Forest]. To the north, I'm sure an easy million on the Shasta-Trinity, which never ceases to burn. The [2018] Camp Fire, if you're familiar with that, burned within four miles of our house. That was at least four years ago, and once that happens, the loss of 85 lives, and that was just the loss that was done that particular day. There's been a hell of a lot of a lot more people that died afterwards. There were some due to burns, and there were just some due to the stress of that fire.

So you know, as with another substance -- it all floats downhill. And after those fires -- the Camp Fire -- Chico has been an absolute semi-chaos due to the social problems we've had down here with homeless. It affects our whole community. It's never stopped affecting us.

And then, I think, a couple years later [2020] -- and Frank Carroll's more of an expert on this -- Forest Service burned down the town of Berry Creek, up the hill from us, and that was 16 more people, and you don't hear about it. If you, if one firefighter loses his or her life, it's national [news]. We lose 16 people in the town of Berry Creek, and absolutely zero publicity on that. And we just finally, three years later, have the school built back in Berry Creek, and we're opening up that school up there.

So what slides under the media right now is the effect it has on local people. And I could talk about the smoke because I'm involved in athletic events. How does that affect our public schools, and our cross country meets in the fall? We have 40 schools gathered, we have 400 athletes, and we have to monitor the smoke. And a lot of it came from that [2024] Shoe Fire outside of Redding. They dicked around in that fire for six weeks. Didn't put it out, every day more smoke rolls in. Well, they thought they were doing a good job, but they don't consider the people, the taxpayers who live in the community.

I mean, you look at southern Oregon, the Shakespeare Festival. They shut that down for years. Two million dollars lost. You look at the wine industry, southern Oregon. Shut that down because of smoke.

The Forest Service lives in their little fragmented world, and they say that you know they're taxpayers supported, but they don't give a blank-blank about the taxpayers, as far as I'm concerned.

Okay, I'm here as editor of *Smokejumper Magazine*, which I've been doing for the past 24 years. I see on our Board, our *Smokejumper* Board, as we age -- the older end of it, who remember the Forest Service as it was, stand fast on this, "put the fire -- first, put out the fire!" I can go along with that.

We have the newer and younger people come in, and they have drunk the Kool-Aid. You know, they can't understand what is happening to us now, and I'm going to say: "Just wait. Wait until we burn your town down. Oh, then you're going to have a come to Jesus moment. Once we burn you down, you're finally going to get serious about this."

We live under smoke here in Chico about one month a year. The Forest Service has not factored that into their equation. I can guarantee you, they don't talk about it. Estimates -- there's, you know, the current Forest Service person on our Board says, "well, we deal with science."

Well, they deal with the science they want to deal with. There's enough science out there that tells about smoke. What they're doing, they're taking a health problem that they're creating; they're kicking it down the line because it's going to be funded by another agency. They don't have to worry about the effect on our kids, our grandparents, everything around that we've got in our community. It gets very discouraging when I sit in these meetings, and I listen to the current Forest Service people. I think they're dialing in from Mars as far as I'm concerned.

Yes, sir, get back to smokejumping! Smokejumpers were established in 1940 as a quick initial attack. There's no reason to fly an airplane and jump out of an airplane unless you could get there quicker than other people can. Smokejumping has been very effective. I jumped at Cave Junction in southern Oregon. The base was closed in 1982 to save money.

Okay, since 1982, we probably had over a billion -- that's with a "B" -- dollars'

worth of wildfire on the Siskiyou National Forest. I've heard that the Kalmiopsis Wilderness Area is nothing but sticks and brush right now. For the 42 years we had smokejumpers there, we've annually burned about 800 acres a year.

Okay, we were off the ground -- what we call "wheels up" -- in 10 minutes. We got there, we put it out.

The people who want "natural fire" to happen -- there's a time and a place for natural fire, but you need some people that know what they're doing and what we've seen, you know -- Nadine [Bailey] knows about it, Roger Jaegel knows about it. What we've seen on Shasta-Trinity, when you get these outside crews in, they're from Timbuktu. They don't know what's going on.

They start -- they want to burn off. They think that's "protecting." Well, anybody in their right mind -- let's put a 5th grader in charge of the fire. They would not burn off and light it off under red flag conditions. So then we burn up a few towns on the way. Well, it doesn't make any difference with them, because they could go back to West Virginia when that fire is over.

But the town of Ruth [2020] is gone.

Smokejumper use we've seen in the last 20 years goes down and down and down. And I talked to the current smokejumpers, and that is a very talented bunch of men and women. I think I would say some of the top wildland firefighters in the world. I mean, you cannot match their expertise and their physical condition, but it doesn't make any difference if you wait for three days to call them. As I say, we used to be off the ground in 10 minutes after the call.

The key to wildland fire is to keep it small, and I'm going to use this illustration: I jumped the Gila National Forest in New Mexico one year. That's when there was a forest in New Mexico, and we had 24 jumpers, and we would fly the thunderstorms. We knew they occurred every afternoon. We got up in that DC-3. We flew right behind the storm -- got a little bumpy at times -- we were on the fires within an hour of the time that lightning struck that tree.

420 fire jumps that summer for that small crew -- the average size of the fire, one-tenth of an acre. That shows quick initial attack.

Well, do we even think about that anymore? I talked to the current smokejumpers, and I said: "Wow, why don't you guys get up? You know, you know, you have a

better idea where the storms are now. You know where the lightning are now. You could all, you could tell where the intensity of the lightning strikes are. Why don't you fly that area right behind the storm?"

And they say: "Wow! What a good idea!" You know, it sounds like I just invented sliced bread or something like that. What a great idea! Holy Toledo! What they say, you know, [. . .] common sense is very uncommon.

So I get a little enthusiastic about this, but I just hate to see a primary resource not used. We've got 400 smokejumpers in the United States: about 200 are BLM, 193 are Forest Service. And I go into the Smokejumper website, and I look at what they're doing every day, and I see right now what they're using smokejumpers for -- is what they call "single resources." They go on to a fire and they become the air tanker boss. They become the safety officer. They, since we've had the professional smokejumpers that's year-long, they are checking off all the little job requirements on their -- it's like merit badges for the Boy Scouts. The more you check, the higher badge you get. They're enthused about that.

We, however, if you gave them a job, and that was to put out the fires and go do it, I'm telling you, you could get them fired up where they could start doing it again. But right now this do-nothing attitude is filtering into what I see is what the most primary, best group of wildland firefighters you could get.

I say I would like to tune into that daily status report instead of seeing a hundred smokejumpers sitting, I'd like to see zero. I'd like to see every last doggone one used, because if you use them right, smokejumpers are retrievable, and the cycle keeps going.

The object is not to keep jumpers on the fire, the object is: they get to the fire, they keep it small. You get them the heck out of there, you man it with resources, and then you keep the recycle going.

I did in New Mexico. We jumped in the late afternoon. We worked all night. We got picked up the next morning by helicopter, the next day, 5 o'clock, 3 o'clock boom! We're out again.

That's how you control it. And the people who want to, you know -- I just watched a video from the Fire Center [USFS Fire Sciences Laboratory] in Missoula, and I get so pissed off sitting here watching it because I can't yell back at them

But they say, "managed fire." We need "managed fire." Well, sure, we all know we need managed fire. It's been happening for years and years and years, but their definition of management, and our definition of management is something different -- and when they got down to the detrimental effects of their managed fire about smoke, they just glossed right over it.

They say they have "science," but they want to ignore the science of this smoke and, boy, this is going to bite the United States in the butt down the line. We don't realize it, but I think that there's enough universities out there saying 10,000 people a year are going to come down with lung disease from these size-2 particles which makes cigarette smoking look very minor.

That's something we've, you know, the Forest Service, is ignoring it. They think they're doing the job with this putting fire on the on the ground, and I'll have to forward this video. It came out of the Fire Center in Missoula, but what they don't realize, they're talking about "managed fire," and that's not the fire we're getting.

When Roger Jaeger took me on the tour of the Shasta-Trinity a couple years ago, we could tell how long ago the fire had been there by the height of the brush. There's no trees anymore. Okay, there's no Johnny Appleseed who walks around the forest spreading seeds. How, and I'm not a forester, but how's the forest going to grow?

If everything is reduced to sterilized soil and no trees, and once the trees are gone, how often does that brush burn? Oh, every five, six, seven, eight years! It burns, and it gets hotter the next time.

I don't see any recovery there. And this spotted owl thing. I'm glad that Bob [Zybach] and Nadine [Bailey] are tackling this thing because that has ruined us, and I'm looking at it from the standpoint of a teacher and a wildland firefighter.

I've seen communities along Highway 299 decimated. I've seen schools close. You try to remember that like 40% of those monies went into the public school system to educate kids. It provided jobs in the towns. It kept things going.

We worry about jobs for people and at the same time California, Washington, Oregon -- the spotted owl has killed us, and now we're dealing with this crazy thing where the [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] wants to stop what's called "evolution." They haven't figured out that evolution has been going on for quite a

while, and if you got the barred owl moved in, maybe that's an evolutionary process, you know. If we want to get right back down to it, let's create some dinosaurs or something. And then we could really add something of every species.

So my last thing is this logging. I grew up, my family is a logging family, lived up in Sterling City [California]. That's where my grandfather grew up there, and I think it was called Diamond Match at that time. But now the only logging we have in northern California is the private forest, which looked pretty good, then we run into the brush patch and solid timber -- solid "sticks," I won't say timber -- and that's the Forest Service land.

And I talked to the private foresters, and they're just worried about the fire coming off the Forest Service land and going to burn up good timber. I have trouble with these people that don't want to cut down trees, you know. I think, you know, trees are like asparagus. If you cut them down, you could always grow more trees.

I just see the benefit to society with this income, and I'm kind of arguing with these people from Missoula about this. They say well, if you log, we still have this underbrush and stuff there. Well, if you're smart, the logging brings in money, and you hire crews to clear the land. You have money to do this. Rather than spending five billion dollars a year fighting a fire, let's spend half that in preventing the fire.

And then one person says: "well, the demand for wood products is down now," and I said: "Wow! You know, I think you've got your head in your left back pocket because there's something wrong here." The demand for wood products has never been higher in the world than it is now. Like the World Bank says, wood products are an 11 billion dollar a year industry.

And when I was writing a book on smokejumpers in the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], it was during Laos and Vietnam, and I was seeing how they work. They clearcut, and there's no recovery for the ground over there. There were log trucks stacked, I'd say, 20 feet high. So we are, we want to protect the doggone spotted owl here, but we are the largest importer of wood products in the world.

So what hypocrites we are. Let's cut down all the forests in Laos, in Vietnam, and the Amazon, then we could claim, we don't use, we don't cut our trees, and then I say: "Okay everybody, go home and throw out everything in your house if it's got wood in it."

Okay, they would be living in a nylon tent if they did that. So that's enough. I quit.

Yeah, let me give you some background. I started with the Forest Service in 1957, spent two seasons on what we called a tanker crew at that time -- on the Lassen [National] Forest; went into smokejumping for the next 13 years with the Forest Service out of Cave Junction in southern Oregon; then I transferred to the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] out of McGrath and Fairbanks, Alaska, for four more seasons; switched back down here and spent the last 19 years' seasons on the Mendocino [National] Forest.

I was their "Type 2 Crew Coordinator." In other words, I went around, recruited young people, mainly college-age students, and I put them into crews. I ran about 13 crews a summer for 19 years. That's -- was my one job. My other job, I'm a public school teacher -- was a public school teacher -- here in Chico for 38 years, and I've been a track coach down here for 50 plus years.