



P.O. Box 545
Escondido, CA 92033

Silver Fire Defies Popular Beliefs About Wildfire by Burning Within the Deadly 2006 Esperanza Fire Scar

**According to conventional wisdom, the seven-year-old vegetation
was not supposed to burn**

Defying the fundamental assumption that older “overgrown” vegetation is the cause of large wildfires, the devastating 2013 Silver Fire near Banning, California, burned through invasive weeds and young, desert chaparral recovering from the deadly 2006 Esperanza Fire (map next page). Such high fire frequency will lead to the spread of more weeds and the loss of native chaparral (the natural fire return interval for chaparral is 30 to 150 years).

Proponents of backcountry vegetation treatments have maintained that the cause of large wildfires is unnatural “fuel” build up due to past fire suppression efforts. It is claimed that younger fuels will not carry a fire. The loss of 26 homes and the burning of young vegetation by the Silver Fire contradict this notion.

While sounding intuitively correct, such fuel-focused perspectives are not supported by the most recent scientific research. With a rapidly warmer climate and an increasing population causing more ignitions, whether the fuel is composed of weedy grasses, young or old native shrubs, or trees, southern California wildfires will likely continue to be large and intense.

Like earthquakes, large wildland fires in southern California are inevitable. Instead of trying to prevent them by clearing large areas of backcountry habitat, we need to use strategies that have been proven to be the most effective in protecting lives, property, and the natural environment from wildland fire. Namely, create communities that are fire safe through hazard relevant zoning, fire resistant construction and retrofits, appropriate defensible space, and strategic fuel breaks (within 1,000 feet of homes) in conjunction with firefighter safety zones. Such an approach needs to be incorporated into both California’s Fire Plan and the final revision of Cal Fire’s Vegetation Treatment Program.

Changing the question from, “how do we stop wildland fires?” to “how do we protect lives and property from wildland fire?” will allow us to focus on the best available science and the most effective strategies to create fire safe communities.

Additional information regarding the most recent science on fire is available on our website:
<https://www.californiachaparral.org/fire/its-about-the-wind/>

