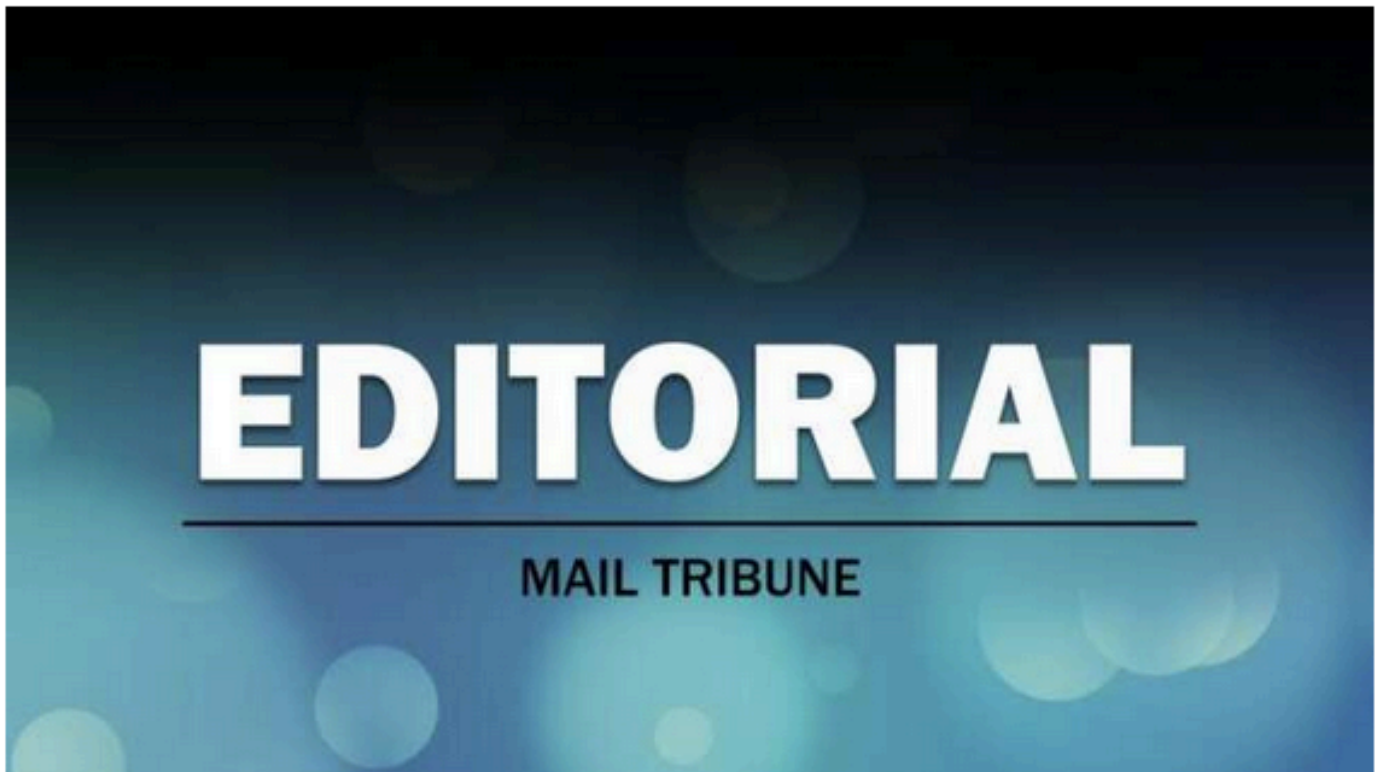


Private prescribed burns are part of the solution

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Government agencies ramped up controlled burns on public forest lands this past fall and spring to reduce fuels and make uncontrolled wildfires less likely. A companion effort hampered by the pandemic managed to conduct two prescribed burns this spring on private land. That should continue in earnest next fall.



Environmentalists will argue that fuels don't cause wildfires, weather and climate conditions do, and that thinning and reducing fuels in remote forestlands won't prevent catastrophic fires. But they will agree that doing this kind of underburning near residential properties is important. That's why enlisting private landowners is key to treating more forest acres where it will do the most good.

The problem with prescribed burning is that it takes knowledge, equipment and trained firefighters to do it successfully. The Rogue Valley Prescribed Burn Association can provide all of that, and the more landowners who get involved, the more helpers there will be to treat more property.

Prescribed burns differ from the typical practice of pile burning, where a landowner collects small trees, underbrush and other material and burns it in one spot. That can cause problems if sparks and embers escape into the canopy, requiring fire crews to respond and put out what could be a destructive fire.



Prescribed burns, ignited with drip torches, creep slowly along the ground, consuming underbrush, pine needles and other flammable debris without harming mature trees. Ponderosa pines are particularly suited to this kind of fire and benefit from the removal of competing plant species and the nutrient-rich soil left behind.

There is a growing consensus that more of this kind of fire is needed to restore forest lands that have become overgrown as a result of decades of government policy geared to suppress fires at all costs. The Sacramento Bee reported recently that federal agencies spend about \$500 million a year on prescribed burns, but nearly \$3.5 billion on fighting wildfires.

The local association, organized by wildland firefighter Aaron Krikava, is a small but important effort to focus more energy on preventing catastrophic wildfires before they start. Fire season has started for this summer, so conditions don't allow any more burns. Landowners should get involved now in planning more demonstration burns next fall when wet weather returns.