

Opinion: Close encounters with a scary fire season

By Michael Baughman, High Country News

In September 1982, my wife, Hilde, and I learned firsthand about wildfires during a backpacking trip in Northern California. While we were fly-fishing a creek miles from camp, we noticed a cloud of smoke drifting upstream. More smoke, thick smoke, soon followed, and then hot wind, and then we saw the first orange flames. We had no choice but to run for our lives, trees exploding in bursts of flame not far behind us. After two hours we made it safely out of the forest, our white T-shirts splotted with red by the fire retardant dropped from overhead planes. If we hadn't been in good shape, we might have died.

Fast-forward to September 2017. The Klamath, Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges converge near the Oregon-California border to create an irreplaceable combination of co-existing ecosystems. In 2000, to protect this unique area, President Bill Clinton established the 86,774-acre Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. Then, in 2017, President Barack Obama expanded it by adding 48,000 acres.

Thanks to Donald Trump's Interior secretary, Ryan Zinke, a recommendation that would scale back the monument's size is currently under review. Zinke's proposal comes as no surprise. While serving as a congressman from Montana, he voted for a House resolution that would make it easier for the ownership of public lands to be transferred to the states.

Read the whole story