

Our wildfire breaking point

Paradise, Cohasset, Forest Ranch and Berry Creek are built atop some of the most-productive brush-growing lands in the world. We got away with building stick-framed houses in places like these for a century by continually upping the ante on our fire-suppression efforts. Jumbo-jet airtankers can rain 9,000 gallons of red mud on a fire in a single drop; we can mobilize 3,000 firefighters from places like Beverly Hills or Huntington Beach to Chester in a day; but we have reached a breaking point. Our army will never outmatch fire. We might as well fight the ocean.



by
Zeke Lunder

The author, a pyro-geographer who has worked in wildland fire management and analysis since 1995, publishes the wildfire-education website the-lookout.org.

A hundred years waging war on fire and criminalizing its use gave us broken ecosystems and communities on the brink. We won many battles, but with climate change as an ally, fire won the war. It's over, and as long as we refuse to surrender,

fire will keep up its siege until every last mountain town and green tree burn to ash. We can blame PG&E or Gov. Gavin Newsom, but when the weather, fuels and topography align, fires like the Dixie, Camp and Bear are an unstoppable force. The longer we pretend this isn't true, the more dangerous living in the hills becomes.

When I say we should surrender to fire, I am not suggesting we park our fire trucks and watch our last couple foothill communities get fried—rather that we should stop pretending firefighters and bigger airtankers can continue to protect us, and take matters into our own hands.

We've led people to believe 100 feet of brush clearance will make their house defensible. But that's not enough, not anymore. We need to see the entire community as the treatment area, connecting our brush-cutting efforts with our neighbors and, most importantly, burning together in the winter. As long as we deny fire its rightful place in our hills, it will continue to eat our lunch.

For more information on how to use fire on your land, contact the Butte County Resource Conservation District (bcrd.org).

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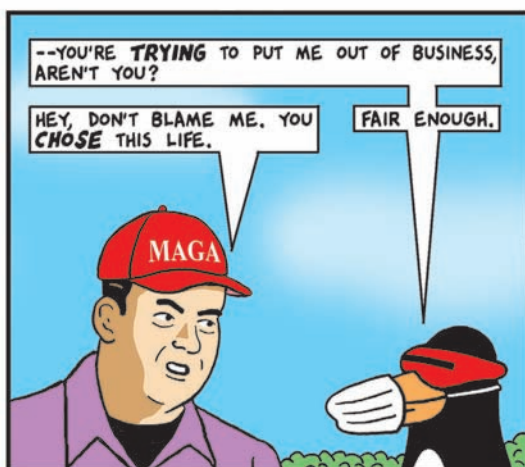
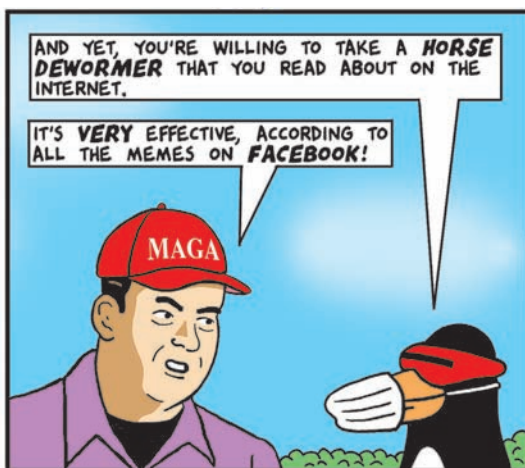
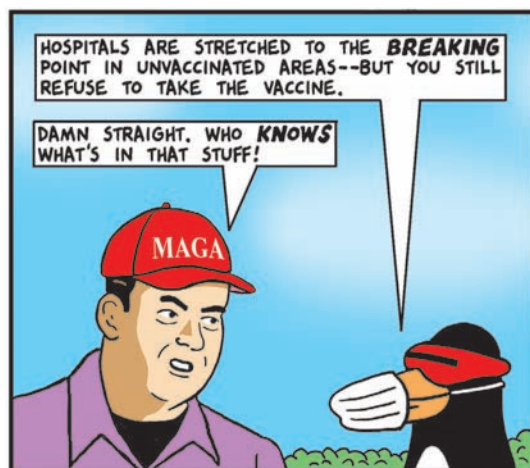
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BY TOM TOMORROW



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