

The Sensible Environmentalist

(NAPS)—Dear Dr. Moore:

I've heard that forestry can help reduce the threat of wildfires. How does that work?

What you're talking about is referred to as active management. It means taking active steps in the forest to reduce natural catastrophes such as fire, disease or insect infestation. The alternative is to leave the forest alone and let nature take its course.



Dr. Moore

It's a controversial subject. Some people believe that humans shouldn't interfere—that leaving the forest alone is always better. Throughout history, frequent low-intensity fires have played an important role in the health of forests and ecosystems, burning smaller trees and undergrowth and leaving large trees mostly intact.

Today, these fires are often suppressed—and for good reason. Our forests are in and around cities and towns where people live. Letting nature take its course puts human life and property at risk.

By suppressing these fires, we have created an unnatural build-up of what can best be described as fuel for much more devastating, catastrophic wildfires. North American forests are as abundant now as they were 100 years ago. But many, par-

ticularly in the U.S., are now overly dense and highly prone to fire. Some are also diseased and pose a very real danger to the healthy forests that surround them.

Catastrophic fires often burn at much higher temperatures than normal fires and cause incredible devastation. As we saw during this year's fire season, homes and even entire communities are lost or threatened. These fires also kill countless animals; pollute rivers, streams and lakes, resulting in the loss of entire fish populations; and leave the earth effectively sterilized for many years.

By actively managing these forests—removing dead wood and thinning the undergrowth, removing some trees, or intentionally burning areas that are distant from homes—we can help to maintain forests that are more open and resistant to natural catastrophe.

We have a responsibility to use our knowledge and experience to help keep North American forests healthy. I believe that a sensible environmentalist would support active forest management to reduce risks to the forest and its inhabitants, human life, and property.

• *Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder and former president of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions for Dr. Moore can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmentalist.com.*