



## ENVIRONMENT

### FULL MEASURE WITH SHARYL ATTKISSON

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30 min.

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The picture postcard views around Big Sur vanished this summer as record wildfires closed the highways and hotels, keeping everyone but the firefighters from one of the central coast's crown jewels.

Bob Baird, the supervisor of the Los Padres National Forest puts the fires out.

Bob Baird: The terrain is incredibly complex. It's rugged California with some of the steepest terrain in the lower 48.

Summer wildfires in the West have been burning bigger, hotter and faster over the last several years, consuming not only the landscape, but the budget of the agency charged with fighting the fires.

Robert Bonnie, the head of the us forest service, has spent the last four years trying to get congress to treat fires more like natural disasters.

Robert Bonnie: We need congress to act and we need them to act now.

That would shift the cost off the forest service ledgers and over to funds used for emergencies like hurricanes, tornadoes and floods.

Robert Bonnie: If you look back about 20 years, the forest service spent about 1/6th of its budget on fire and firefighting...last year in a bad year, we spent north of 60% on fire related expenses. It was close to \$3 billion dollars last year, out of an agency budget that's about 5 billion so you can see that the agency is being more and more less a forest service and more a fire service.

The Los Padres National Forest - is ground zero for one of the summer's worst fires, now surpassing 120-thousand acres.

Thousands of firefighters are using fire to fight fire. Not to mention the helicopters, bulldozers, and fleets of water trucks. All this at a cost of \$210 million and counting.



With extreme fires consuming so much of the forest service's budget programs designed to prevent fires are in jeopardy. In fact, in 2015, the forest service had to take \$700 million from prevention programs and put it into firefighting.

These flammable landscapes become far more volatile when the money isn't there to manage pests like the tree killing bark beetle. They will burrow around the tree in the layer that actually carries the water up to the top of the tree.

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Fire captain Mike Lindbergy works on some of the biggest fires across the country. He says

Mike Lindbergy: They're estimating 60-million trees are dead standing right now all over the state.

Lisa Fletcher: And what is the translation for a firefighter?

Mike Lindbergy: The translation for a firefighter is one, faster moving more deadly fires and the fact even while they're fighting these fires there's the danger of the trees dropping on them at any point.

Lisa Fletcher: And you already had one firefighter killed with a tree dropping on them.

Mike Lindbergy: There was a firefighter killed last week from a tree dropping on him, that's correct.

Forest fires produce a double jeopardy. After crews extinguish the flames the barren landscape creates a threat for mudslides and poisoning local water.

Robert Bonnie: We don't have the resources we need to invest in reforestation, and we have a substantial backlog, i think it might be as much as 5 million acres of areas where we'd like to plant trees post fire and we essentially can't.

Mark Gerwe's been on the front line for months.

Lisa Fletcher: Is this a disaster?

Mark Gerwe: Absolutely it's a disaster...and uh, for congress and Washington not to recognize that, and start giving us what we need to do our job...i think they need to take a hard look at that and understand that this is, this is what's going on.



For years, the house and senate have been at an impasse over how to pay for putting out the biggest wildfires.

Lisa Fletcher: People out there are tired of hearing about so many committees and so many people involved that can't come to an agreement.

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Bonnie: That's exactly right - this is an issue where there is broad agreement and we need to fix it. It's absolutely clear... I think this is becoming more and more an issue that many Americans see every day and think the anger is for not getting on top of this faster, for congress not acting, is growing.

And so are the fires. More than 14 million acres have burned in the last two years.