

# Mike Bloomberg's Wildfire Policy

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As the world adapts to climate change and rising global temperatures, unprecedented disasters are devastating American communities and natural environments. [Compared to 1986](#), wildfires in the western U.S. now break out more than four times more often, burn more than six times the land area and last almost five times as long.<sup>1</sup> In California, where [1 in 4 people](#) live in a high-risk area,<sup>2</sup> [wildfires have killed over 150 people, burned 3.75 million acres, and destroyed over 35,000 structures](#) since 2017.<sup>3</sup> Wildfire-caused economic losses [exceeded \\$40 billion](#) in 2017 and 2018.<sup>4</sup>

These intensifying wildfires are also a [source of carbon emissions](#) and a [growing contributor to greenhouse gas emissions](#) from land and agriculture systems.<sup>5</sup> That's why Mike is prioritizing the fight to prevent wildfires as part of his overall approach to climate action and resilience.

**Mike will lead a national effort to address the growing wildfire threat, setting a goal of reducing wildfire-caused loss of life and property by 50% within four years.** In partnership with Western states and local officials, his administration will spearhead an ambitious initiative to make forests and communities more fire-resistant, while investing in staffing, data and technology to make firefighting safer and more effective.

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## 1. Lead a nationwide effort to strengthen the nation's resilience against wildfires.

Responsibility for preventing and fighting fires crosses multiple jurisdictions and interests—federal, state, local, private and tribal. In the West in particular, multiple landowners can be involved between the point where a fire starts and where it causes the most damage. The kind of large-scale action required demands strong leadership and coordination. Mike knows that it's up to the federal government, as the [majority landowner](#) of forests in the West, to take the lead.<sup>6</sup>

- **Make fire resilience a top priority of the U.S. Forest Service, as well as other federal land management agencies.** Mike will task the Forest Service with coordinating the development of a far-reaching new plan for firefighting and fire prevention for each Western state. The Service will work with other federal partners, local communities, state and local agencies, tribal leaders, environmental groups, private timber companies, rural land owners, utilities and the insurance industry to develop region- or state-specific plans with the goal of reducing life and property loss by half within four years.
- **Improve community resilience and prevent redlining by the insurance industry.** These collaborative fire protection plans will include measures to reduce risk to communities and property, minimize damages in case of fire, and thereby improve the chances of getting or maintaining insurance. Current homeowners who don't have alternatives shouldn't be left without the ability to insure for disasters.

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<sup>1</sup> Hoover Institution, ["A New Normal": California's Increasing Wildfire Risk and What To Do About It](#), May 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Governor Gavin Newsom, [Ahead of Fire Season, Governor Newsom Warns of Wildfire Risk to Urban Communities Across State](#), April 2019.

<sup>3</sup> CAL Fire, [2017-2020 Incident Archives](#).

<sup>4</sup> NOAA, [Billion-Dollar Weather and Climate Disasters: Events](#), 2017-2018.

<sup>5</sup> PNAS, [Strong impact of wildfires on the abundance and aging of black carbon in the lowermost stratosphere](#), 2018.

<sup>6</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, [U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends](#), August 2014

## 2. Invest in large-scale forest fire prevention and management.

One dollar spent on fire mitigation [saves more than \\$3 in costs](#).<sup>7</sup> Yet our current focus remains on firefighting rather than fire prevention. Properly managing forests to reduce the potential for catastrophic wildfires will reduce hazards and save lives. The vast effort needed to tackle this problem at scale will also create local jobs in rural communities, while improving the health of forest ecosystems.

- **Double federal funding for fire resilience and management to \$10 billion and devote half to forest restoration and mitigation efforts.**<sup>8</sup> This would increase spending on prevention roughly tenfold, while still [raising firefighting budgets](#).<sup>9</sup> According to the GAO, while federal agencies estimate that more than 100 million acres of land they manage are at risk from fire, they were only able to treat 3 million acres in fiscal year 2018. Bigger budgets will help to increase the pace and scale of fire resilience and forest restoration, particularly in wildland-urban interface areas.
- **Increase FEMA’s mitigation budgets and the share of total fire spending made available to communities to strengthen resilience.** Fireproofing homes, expanding access roads and defensible spaces, developing evacuation plans, and otherwise strengthening community resilience can save lives, create jobs, reduce the costs and dangers of firefighting, and strengthen insurance networks. Yet currently, the federal government sets aside only 6 cents of every dollar in federal disaster aid to fund pre-disaster mitigation activities. Mike will raise this share so that communities can better prepare before rather than after disaster strikes.
- **Endorse Sen. Kamala Harris’s Wildfire Defense Act, and the similar House bill sponsored by Rep. Jared Huffman.** Mike supports legislation which would invest \$1 billion a year in funding community-based wildfire plans. His administration will work with insurance companies to ensure they take account of such plans in assessing community and home resilience, and in order to incentivize good building.
- **Provide federal loans and grants to local utilities, to reduce the risk from downed power lines.** Mike will help local utilities in their efforts to reduce the risks from downed power lines—maintaining corridors, insulating exposed power lines and installing sensors that can quickly identify maintenance and risk-reduction needs, as well as shut off power to damaged lines. Improving line safety would directly address one of the [most common causes](#)<sup>10</sup> of wildfires. Mike’s administration will also explore the use of forest resilience bonds in order to leverage public and private sources of investment to fund fire prevention work. It will also support the [development of microgrids](#)<sup>11</sup> in high-risk areas to minimize power outages and enhance communities’ capacity to quickly respond and coordinate in the event of an emergency.

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<sup>7</sup> National Institute of Building Sciences, [Federal Grants for Mitigation of Fire Provide \\$3 Benefit for Each \\$1 Invested](#)

<sup>8</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, [FY 2020 Budget Justification](#), March 2019

<sup>9</sup> United States Department of Agriculture, [FY 2020 Budget Justification](#), March 2019

<sup>10</sup> Levin Simes Abrams, [Electrical Power 3rd Most Common Cause of CA Wildfire](#), April 2019

<sup>11</sup> Los Angeles Times, [Op-Ed: There’s a quick way to help prevent wildfires: Shut off the power grid](#), December 2018

### 3. Build the staff, data and technology needed to fulfill this mission at scale.

Looming turnover at the Forest Service threatens to deprive the agency of expertise at a critical moment. Managing forest land for resilience and prevention, and making communities more fire-resilient, will require employing thousands of people, creating well-paying jobs in rural communities. At the same time, new technologies can greatly increase our ability to detect and combat the spread of fires.

- **Create the Wildfire Corps—a new, thousands-strong, federal, state and tribal partnership.** The government would train, employ, equip and embed a skilled workforce to do the work of restoring healthy forest ecosystems and, when fires break out, to provide enough firefighters to offer communities greatly enhanced wildfire protection. The size of the force will be decided in conjunction with states, in accordance with their detailed fire prevention plans. Mike will prioritize hiring in rural and forest communities closest to the problem, creating thousands of new jobs.
- **Use data and technology to detect and mitigate fires and to improve firefighting techniques.** Mike’s administration will help fund a network of [sensors and cameras](#)<sup>12</sup> to detect fires faster and more cheaply, and will strengthen the communications grid for public safety and [emergency notifications](#).<sup>13</sup> It will partner with state authorities to use [satellites, drones, firefighting aircraft, and AI and communications technology](#)<sup>14</sup> to help predict the spread of fires and improve firefighting techniques. In addition, Mike will engage the private sector by providing challenge grants for companies to generate innovations to improve detection and monitoring of fires, as well as communications among first responders, requiring that all data be open-source. And his administration will refine and constantly update detailed national fire risk maps that can be used by local officials to assess risk and plan for future wildfires.

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<sup>12</sup> Independent Institute, [California Wildfires: Key Recommendations to Prevent Future Disasters](#), June 2019

<sup>13</sup> Los Angeles Times, [More than 60 deaths in fires, floods expose weaknesses in California’s fire planning](#), 2018

<sup>14</sup> Independent Institute, [California Wildfires: Key Recommendations to Prevent Future Disasters](#), June 2019