To Capital Press editors,

Your editorial “Forest fires need action” (9/14 edition) was both timely and appropriate. We do need to “expend dollars, resources and sound reasoning to lessen the threat of wildfire”. In the sound reasoning department we should also remember that we got into this mess largely because adherence to the conventional wisdom about forest fire blinded us to the reality of what was happening on the ground. “Thinning” could generate the same sort of blind support that “suppression before 10 AM” did previously and with similar dire consequences for those who come after us.

Most environmental groups and forest watch activists support responsible “thinning” of dense young forests. In fact, American Lands coordinates a West-wide stakeholder group which has developed principles for responsible forest restoration and which promotes their use. The Center for Biological Diversity has been another leader in developing “thinning” projects based on fire-smart standards. But the devil is in the details. If we open the forest too much small trees and brush sprout quickly and in less than a decade we have more fire danger than when we started.

When you prescribe for western forests, please remember that the two most extensive scientific reviews of forest management in the West – the Sierra Nevada and Interior Columbia Ecosystem Projects – found that logging – not fire suppression – has been the single most significant factor which created the increased fire risk. Clearcutting – the preferred logging method of the West’s timber industry – results in tree plantations that rarely survive a forest fire and, as documented by FS researchers, makes adjacent forests burn hotter. High grade selection – the dominant practice of the past – had similar effects.

Capital Press editors wisely call for increased funding to “thin forests and remove undergrowth”. Will you also join in calls for an end to clearcutting and other logging practices which increase fire risk?

Felice Pace
Klamath, California

Felice Pace has been a grassroots forest activist for over 25 years.