

would not get that message from this book. Thus, I suggest a bit of caution. My response to this book is reflected in a statement recently made in reference to scientists and bureaucrats set on Malathion spraying as a means to win the battle against the Mediterranean fruit fly (*L.A. Times*, April 26, 1990): "Without realizing it, they have fallen victim to a fundamental function of the human mind: illusion. The mind creates illusions of life; illusion is the explanation of the images that move across the screen of the conscious mind. The problem is, illusions are crafted around one's interests. You see the world in a way that supports your job. All your research is right-headed, all your methods work." Prescribed burning may be appropriate in some instances, but it is not always the right management strategy.

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Prescribed Burning in California Wildlands Vegetation Management by H.H. Biswell. 1989. Available from University of California Press, Berkeley 94720. \$27.50 hardcover.

Movements are often dependent upon a zealot emerging to lead the cause; Harold Biswell is the zealot of prescribed burning in California. Here Dr. Biswell presents a readable and nicely illustrated book describing his views on the practice of prescribed burning of vegetation. The book focuses on California but much of the material is applicable to other regions. Near the front of the book he described the material to follow as a book "for the general public, not just for fire scientists." While the non-specialist will have no problems with the content, the specialist may be disappointed by the lack of literature citations and generally informal style of writing. Fire scientists will find little new here, but will enjoy reading a nice overview of the field.

"Harry the torch," as he is affectionately known by his students, presents a fine picture of the dynamics of the political struggle he and others endured in the fight to have the ecological role of fire accepted by land managers. All ecologists owe Biswell and his colleagues a debt of gratitude for bringing to light the proper ecological role of fire. I do, however, have reservations about the book which I hope non-specialists, as well as specialists, will consider. Throughout the book there is the pervasive attitude, *if fires are a natural part of the ecosystem, then areas that escape burning for any length of time are unnatural*. This simply is not true. Fire ecologists often describe non-fire-adapted species in pejorative terms, such as white fir (indexed as 'white fire'). This tree often establishes itself in stands of fire-adapted conifers, but the message in this book is this is unnatural, and thus we are told how to control noxious species such as white fir through prescribed burning. The fact that white fir existed in these ranges for eons prior to human intervention must suggest that fire was not ubiquitous in time and space. One