

✘ A centerpiece of the Bush administration's national forest management policy was the claim that vegetation management projects would be targeted to places where wildfire poses high risks to human communities — the “wildland-urban interface.” According to a [new study](#) in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (subscription required) led by Tania Schoennagel at the University of Colorado, that claim was a bunch of hot air. But the Forest Service isn't entirely to blame. Here's the abstract:

Because of increasing concern about the effects of catastrophic wildland fires throughout the western United States, federal land managers have been engaged in efforts to restore historical fire behavior and mitigate wildfire risk. During the last 5 years (2004-2008), 44,000 fuels treatments were implemented across the western United States under the National Fire Plan (NFP). We assessed the extent to which these treatments were conducted in and near the wildland-urban interface (WUI), where they would have the greatest potential to reduce fire risk in neighboring homes and communities. Although federal policies stipulate that significant resources should be invested in the WUI, we found that only 3% of the area treated was within the WUI, and another 8% was in an additional 2.5-km buffer around the WUI, totaling 11%. Only 17% of this buffered WUI is under federal ownership, which significantly limits the ability of federal agencies to implement fire-risk reduction treatments near communities. Although treatments far from the WUI may have some fire mitigation benefits, our findings suggest that greater priority must be given to locating treatments in and near the WUI, rather than in more remote settings, to satisfy NFP goals of reducing fire risk to communities. However, this may require shifting management and policy emphasis from public to private lands.

AP has a story about the report [here](#); the LA Times's Greenspace blog covers it [here](#).