

Here on Legal Planet, we talk a lot about climate skeptics/deniers, and we're highly critical of them (for good reason!). A lot of those climate skeptics/deniers are conservatives.

But there's no monopoly on scientific ignorance on one end of the political spectrum. An example of that is close to home here at UC Berkeley.

In 1991, [a deadly firestorm raced through the Oakland/Berkeley hills, killing 25 people and destroying thousands of homes](#). A key factor in the blaze were the groves of eucalyptus trees growing in the area. [Eucalyptus, which is native to Australia \(not California\) is an extremely flammable tree species](#), and native Californian plants are generally unable to grow and reproduce successfully in eucalyptus groves (in part because [eucalyptus trees acidify the soil](#)). UC Berkeley is [applying to receive federal funds to eliminate tens of thousands of these trees in order to reduce fire risk and help restore native plants and ecosystems to campus](#). One would think that this would receive universal support. One would think, but this is Berkeley, where conspiracy theories sprout profligately from the soil like mushrooms after spring rains...

It turns out that a few folks are outraged about this. Some have simply latched onto the fact that the university is ["clearcutting" trees as the basis for condemning the proposal - as if logging or clearcutting were inherently evil](#). Others object to the ["xenophobia" inherent in eliminating non-native trees in favor of native ones](#) (see the comments following the article). Still others have concerns about herbicide use - which is a reasonable concern, though it appears that the university is taking a lot of steps to make sure the usage is appropriate and the harms are limited. And finally, a few seem to believe that anything that involves herbicide use must be part of a giant conspiracy by giant chemical companies to destroy the planet (again, see some of the comments after the original news article).

Let me be clear here. Cutting down eucalyptus trees to reduce fire risk and restore native plants and ecosystems is generally an environmentally sensible thing to do. It will help native plants and animals do better. And it will keep people safer. Those who argue otherwise are ignoring a lot of fairly clear ecological evidence, primarily because of other prior commitments they have (such as, logging is bad, or chemicals are bad). Sounds a little like climate skeptics/deniers to me.