

New codes may protect homes from wildfires

By DALE KASLER and
PHILLIP REESE
The Sacramento Bee



ABOVE An aerial image shows the home of Sean and Dawn Herr, bottom center, in Paradise, Calif. The Herr home, built in 2010 to new fire-resistant building standards, survived the fire while nearby homes burned.

LEFT Oney and Donna Carrell stand near the ashes of her father's house in Paradise, Calif. Their property had two homes on it before the fire, but the only one to survive visible behind them was built to fire-resistant standards that went into effect in 2008.

AP Photos/Hector Amezcua

PARADISE, Calif. — The sky was turning orange and the embers were flying from the Camp Fire when Oney and Donna Carrell and Donna's father sped away from their Paradise home.

"I thought, 'Oh, well, the house is done,'" Oney Carrell said.

A few days later, they learned otherwise. The Carrells' home survived the deadliest and most destructive wildfire in California history with a couple of warped window frames, a partially charred down spout and a stubborn smoky smell inside.

Most of their neighborhood was destroyed. A guest house in their backyard, where Donna's father lived, was reduced to ashes, along with a couple of sheds. Yet their beautifully restored 1940 Studebaker sat untouched in the garage.

The arc of destruction the Camp Fire carved through Paradise was seemingly random: Why were some houses saved and others incinerated? As millions of Californians brace for another wildfire season, a McClatchy analysis of fire and property records shows the answer might be found in something as simple as the roofs over their heads — and the year their house was built.

A landmark 2008 building code designed for California's fire-prone regions — requiring fire-resistant roofs, siding and other safeguards — appears to have protected the Carrells' home and dozens of others like it from the Camp Fire. That year marks a pivotal moment in the state's

deadly and expensive history of destructive natural disasters.

All told, about 51% of the 350 single-family homes built after 2008 in the path of the

Camp Fire were undamaged, according to McClatchy's analysis of Cal Fire data and Butte County property records. By contrast, only 18% of the 12,100 homes

built prior to 2008 escaped damage. Those figures don't include mobile homes, which burned in nearly equal measure regardless of age.

"These are great stan-

dards; they work," said senior engineer Robert Raymer of the California Building Industry Association, who consulted with state officials on the building code.

Yet despite this lesson, California may end up falling short in its effort to protect homes from the next wildfire.

Mushrooming cities such as Folsom, where an 11,000-home development is springing up, have the ability to bypass the state's safety standards in spite of considerable fire risks. The state, which offers cash incentives to bolster old homes against earthquakes, so far has done nothing to get Californians to retrofit homes built before 2008 for fire safety.

It hasn't helped that housing construction went into a deep dive in 2008 and has been slow to recover. Raymer said only 860,000 homes and apartments have been built statewide since the code went into effect. That's just 6% of the state's housing stock.

According to Cal Fire, as many as 3 million homes lie within the various "fire hazard severity zones" around the state. Dave Sapsis, a Cal Fire wildland fire scientist, said there's no way to know definitively how many of those homes were built before 2008, but he believes "it's the preponderance of them, the majority."

The situation is worse in rural California, where housing construction lags but the fire hazards are among the worst in the state, Raymer said. Fewer than 3% of the homes in the path of the Camp Fire were built after 2008.

"Most of our inventory that was here prior to the fire was (built) between the '40s and the '70s," said Paradise Town Councilman Michael Zuccolillo, a real estate agent. "The average home here was from the '70s."

CAUGHT OVGARD

Fiscal policy is just so taxing in Oregon

By LUKE OVGARD
For the East Oregonian

Taxes are due next week. It's a hot take for those who didn't realize that.

As a taxpayer, I'm painfully aware of the reality taxes impose and pay them begrudgingly.

As a public school teacher and member of the military, I'm painfully aware of my inherent dependency on those same taxes.

It's an awkward balance.

Though I'm neither Republican nor Democrat and adamantly oppose the two-party system that has pitted our country against itself in a perpetual us-versus-them gridlock for half a century, I do share viewpoints from both sides of the aisle as a little "I" independent.

My fiscal policy beliefs are simple: Taxes are a necessary evil, but managing those tax dollars responsibly is simply necessary.

Without waxing political, widespread waste, fraud and abuse of tax dollars has led to a system in which we often struggle to see the direct, downstream value of the money we pour into the system.

Instead, we tend only to notice the taxman taking a bite out of our hard-earned money.

My worst encounter with the taxman came on the Willamette River several years ago. The taxman, embodied in a vicious sea lion hundreds of miles upriver from the ocean, grabbed the 20-plus-pound salmon I'd hooked as I tried in vain to reclaim my prize.

I behaved in a fashion unbecoming of a grown man and brought shame on my family as I sobbed quietly with the realization that I'd lost my fish. It wasn't pretty.

It took 100% of my catch, but I got to see how that tax was utilized as the beast viciously ripped the salmon to shreds on the surface for several minutes while Lion King's "Circle of Life" played softly in the background.



Contributed photo by Luke Ovgard

Despite the bite taken out of his catch by the taxman, this angler smiled broadly, perhaps because he was able to take stock of what he still had.

Most of us aren't simultaneously lucky and unlucky enough to see where our taxes go.

I took for granted every fish I'd caught that hadn't been stolen by the taxman up to that point, just as we may take for granted every public servant who does his or her job correctly.

Every monument, museum and park that is clean and accessible.

Both politicians who aren't crooks. Yes, both.

The second someone screws up, we notice.

Perhaps money matters that much to us because we sacrifice so much to earn it.

I once read, "We don't pay for things with money; we pay for them with hours of lives," and if we're giving hours of our lives away for taxes, what do we get in return?

Cue introspection.

Forcing you to think isn't what you came here for; you came here to read about fishing. I'm getting there, but if you think this column is purely about fishing, then in the words of my friend and fellow fishing writer, Steve



Contributed photo by Luke Ovgard

A small bite out of a small fish is small. A small bite out of a 30-pound class yellowtail is actually quite a large bite.

Wozniak: "Welcome. You must be new here."

The taxman

Monthly payroll deductions aren't my only experience with the taxman. Nor was that sea lion.

I've seen a sea lion take a chunk out of a salmon in Humboldt Bay. It took mostly guts, but the salmon came to net maybe 5% lighter thanks to the bite of the taxman.

I watched yet another sea lion (seeing a pattern

here?) steal a massive yellowtail from a fellow angler on a charter boat in southern California. After the captain circled the boat several times, the deckhand was finally able to knock the fish out of the sea lion's mouth with a gaff before using the same hook to bring the fish on board to the thrill of every person there. The bite out of the fish's middle was a small price to pay, but it can be much steeper.

I've lost sunfish to hungry bass, perch to ospreys, pelicans and grebes. I've even lost sturgeon to other anglers who, in their lack of experience, snagged the fish I'd already hooked and pulled harder with heavier gear.

And speaking of snags, well, don't get me started.

It's not all loss, though. You can beat the taxman from time to time.

There was the day I reeled in a 3-foot lingcod just inches ahead of an incoming great white shark while fishing out of Newport as the rest of the boat watched, wide-eyed. As that fish clattered to the floor of

the boat, a laurel was placed on my head and a trophy in my hand as flowers began to pile up at my feet.

In reality, the taxman is not a vicious shark, a gluttonous sea lion, or a menacing bird.

At least, not in spirit.

We all know taxes are necessary for schools, roads, public safety, and a host of other social programs we rely on for civilization to function, including the management of public lands.

Oregon's 53% public lands are an embarrassment of riches, and most are managed by tax-funded agencies.

So our money doesn't go to waste if we actually use the services they provide.

Refund

Don't roll your eyes.

If you hate paying taxes, you're not alone.

If you hate tax refunds, you just might be.

While some may hate tax season, I live for it because I know it can mean a hefty refund.

For most American families, a tax refund means the largest infusion of cash each year. It can go to debt service, savings or, for me, recreation.

You may not have a child to put into the public education system.

You may not draw Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid.

You may not understand how the national defense budget benefits you.

But you can absolutely take advantage of our public lands.

So while you figure out what to do with your refund, I'll be maximizing my refund at every lake, river, stream and beach I can access in the 53% of our state that runs on hours of our lives but pays dividends to those who decide to invest just a few more. Fiscal policy is just so taxing.

Read more at caughtovgard.com; Follow on Instagram and Fishbrain @ [lukeovgard](https://www.instagram.com/lukeovgard); Contact lukeovgard@gmail.com.