In Fire's Way: A Practical Guide to Life In the Wildfire Danger Zone. By Tom Wolf. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003. viii + 168 pp. Halftones, notes, glossary, bibliography, index. $16.95 paper, ISBN 0-8263-2096-1.)

Smokechasing. By Stephen Pyne. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003. xi + 260 pp. $19.95 paper, ISBN 0-8165-2285-5.)

Tom Wolf does not want your house to burn down in a forest fire. He offers some useful tips for reducing home flammability similar to the guidelines available from an extension agent or Firewise (*www.firewise.org*). He shares an interesting personal experience of the "don't try this at home" variety, describing how a prescribed burn that he initiated got out of control, but the rest of the book is disappointing. Wolf wrestles with the most intractable issue in western fire policy today: how to live in our fire-prone environment. Despite an impressive array of statistics, *In Fire's Way* flounders amidst an overabundance of disconnected data.

Wolf raises key questions about contradictions in the conventional perspectives on fire problems. For instance, should fuel treatments focus on the immediate vicinity of homes or the broader landscape? Should public agencies or private organizations assume responsibility for home fire protection? These kinds of questions cannot be easily answered, but Wolf fails to provide a sound analysis that allows the reader to evaluate the issues. Instead, the questions are superficial, leaving the reader less, not more enlightened. The majority of the research, culled from newspaper or magazine articles, further indicates Wolf's lack of depth. Toward the end of the book, he presents numerous bulleted lists of "successful" fuel projects that he apparently gathered from organizational brochures rather than developed through actual investigation. One such list was omitted entirely (p. 127), perhaps due to a failure on the part of author and editor to pay attention to the less engaging parts of the text.

The most frustrating element of the book is the reiteration of antigovernment rhetoric. Certainly, federal and state agencies are cumbersome and could benefit from many useful reforms. Wolf's attack on "the government"—while he fails to note that subdivisions springing up throughout western wildlands are made possible only by large-scale federal subsidies in the form of water projects, military bases, and other projects—is disingenuous. An extended critique of the 2000 Cerro Grande fire, for example, occupies all of chapter 5

and reappears throughout the book. Overall, homeowners concerned with wildfire hazards would do better to pick up *Flames in our Forest: Disaster or Renewal?* by Stephen F. Arno and Steven Allison-Bunnell (2002) for a superior treatment of fire ecology, fire behavior, and practical ways in which fuels can be modified for a safer environment.

The essays collected in Stephen Pyne's *Smokechasing* are also about fire, but their coverage encompasses the globe (Africa, Europe, Mexico, Australia, and the American West). The themes range widely as well, from the eco-social assessment of fire policies in "A Land Between" to the brief but deeply personal "Why I Do It." Pyne's keynote essay, after which the collection is named, defines the term *smokechasing* on several levels: pursuing a thread of smoke through rugged terrain, tracking the vaporous documents that record the history of fire, and approaching the deeper question of how humans comprehend fire. Pyne scoffs at postmodern irony: "Those at a desk have the luxury of asking whether one can ever truly 'find' a smoke" (p. 190), while the "groundpounder" must deal with the dangerous reality of steep hillsides and burning snags.

The theme that links the essays is how—and how poorly—humans understand fire. We have the "dumb problem" of having our houses burn up because of our inability to reconcile the many facets of fire. In reviewing the Cerro Grande fire in "An Incident at Praxis," for example, Pyne offers a perspective that is more subtle than Wolf's litany of governmental screwups. He suggests that National Park Service managers were caught in a worldview centered on the "natural" role of fire to the exclusion of adequate attention to the constraints of modern environments. Their myopia led them to push too hard to burn. In "An Exchange for All Things?" Pyne argues ultimately for a comprehensive scholarship that integrates fire ecology, fire management, and fire philosophy.

Pyne's essays are sometimes repetitious and occasionally lacking detail (the fire history of Europe sounds just like the fire history of Mexico), but the diversity and depth of his thought make this collection a valuable addition to "the literature of forest fires, if there is such a literature" (a quotation Pyne borrowed from Norman Maclean). My favorite essay is "Doc Smith's History Lesson," because it encapsulates the connection between people and fire. Pyne links Doc's personal history as a Forest Service district ranger and fire-suppression boss to the natural history found in tree rings and fire scars and to the political history of western settlement and forestry. The author contends with the choices that face contemporary society: forest

restoration, a new way to live with fire or a continued losing battle to control this most ubiquitous of disturbance forces. Pyne presents Doc as a living example of the integrated scholarship that he sees as the greatest hope for finding this new path.

Unlike Wolf, Pyne is not trying to offer practical or businesslike recipes for how many trees to cut. But in the accelerated crush of increasingly severe fire seasons, and with the shock of burned homes and shrill voices raised in accusation, Pyne provides a broader perspective and raises the most important questions. Do we know what smoke we are chasing? What should we do when we find it?

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