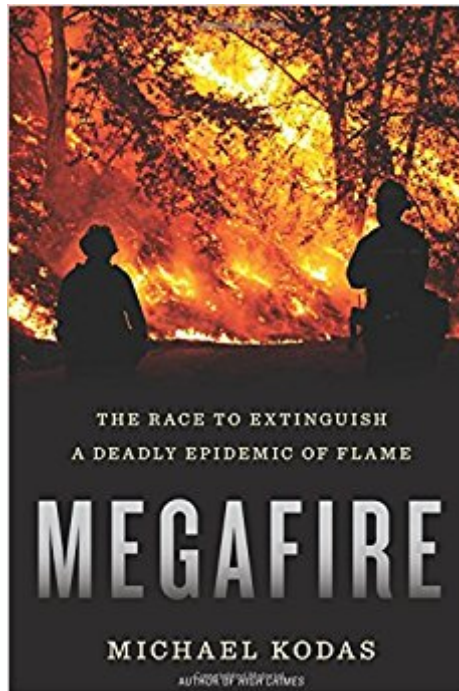




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Megafire: The Race To Extinguish A Deadly Epidemic Of Flame



Synopsis

A brilliant exploration of the rising phenomenon of megafires—forest fires of alarming scale, intensity, and devastation—that explains the science of what is causing them and captures the danger and heroism of those who fight them. In *Megafire*, a world-renowned journalist and forest fire expert travels to the most dangerous and remote wildernesses, as well as to the backyards of people faced with these environmental disasters, to look at the heart of this phenomenon and witness firsthand the heroic efforts of the firefighters and scientists racing against time to stop it—or at least to tame these deadly flames. From Colorado to California, China to Canada, the narrative hopscotches the globe and takes readers to the frontlines of the battle both on the ground and in the air, and in the laboratories, universities, and federal agencies where this issue rages on. Through this prism of perspectives, Kostas zeroes in on a handful of the most terrifying and tumultuous of these environmental disasters in recent years—the Yarnell Hill Fire in Arizona that took the lives of nineteen elite “hotshot” firefighters, the Waldo Canyon Fire that overwhelmed the city of Colorado Springs—and more in a page-turning narrative that puts a face on the brave people at the heart of this issue. *Megafire* describes the profound impact of these fires around the earth and will change the way we think about the environment and the essential precariousness of our world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“This is one scary book—it’s hard to imagine a more thorough accounting of the

ways we're managing to turn our planet into an inferno." —Bill McKibben, author of *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet* "When it comes to the complicated dynamics of wildfire, few writers can match the breadth and depth of knowledge of Michael Kudas. Fewer still can measure up to his muscular prose. Kudas trains a keen eye and masterful turn of phrase on the politics of wildfire — a problem bound to visit more death and destruction on communities across the American West while politicians duck the painful decisions to put their constituents and wild lands ahead of votes." —Scott Wallace, author of *Unconquered: In Search of the U.S.'s Last Uncontacted Tribes* "There's almost nothing 'natural' about the megafires that in recent years have killed dozens of people and cost billions of dollars in the U.S. alone. I don't know any writer better equipped to explain what's gone wrong than Michael Kudas, who shines a light both on the astonishing bravery of the hotshots on the front lines and on the waste and ineptitude of the politicians and bureaucrats who too often fail them, sometimes with fatal consequences. His recounting of the deadly wildfires at Yarnell Hill and Waldo Canyon will tingle your spine and boil your blood." —Dan Fagin, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Toms River: A Story of Science and Salvation* "Megafire is not simply a book about the apocalypse of wild fires spreading across the globe. It is also an exhaustively researched treatise on the folly of man. Michael Kudas has adroitly addressed such issues as overbuilding in wild fire zones, mismanagement of forests and climate change which, if not reversed, will continue to bedevil the planet." —Rinker Buck, NYT bestselling author of *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey* "As natural disasters balloon in size around the globe, it becomes increasingly harder to view climate change as an abstraction. Wild fires, in particular, are growing bigger, burning hotter, and racing faster than previous experts ever imagined possible. Michael Kudas documents exactly how a mix of human apathy, ignorance, and greed kindled this problem, then accelerated it with good, but misguided, intentions. Megafire is an impeccably researched journey through a terrifying phenomenon." —Bronwen Dickey, contributing editor of *The Oxford American* and author of *Pit Bull: The Battle over an American Icon* "Around the world, writes award-winning journalist and photographer Kudas, 'megafires' are billowing each fire season, thanks to a perfect storm of related causes . . . Kudas brings new insight to the[se] events. Worthy of shelving alongside the best of modern firefighting books — and of the broadest audience." —Kirkus Reviews, starred review "A surprising page-turner. Always respectful of the lives lost fighting fire, the author never loses sight of the bigger picture: the fires aren't going away, and current approaches to addressing that fact are based on antiquated

ideas. This is a must-read for all as forest fires spread across the country." —Booklist

MICHAEL KODAS is the deputy director of the Center for Environmental Journalism at the University of Colorado, Boulder, an award-winning photojournalist and reporter, and author of the best-selling book *High Crimes: The Fate of Everest in an Age of Greed*. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.

This is one of the most gripping stories I have read, fiction or nonfiction. And the fact that it is actually happening makes it all the more terrifying. Two years ago I went to Colorado outside of Boulder, where forests had up to 30% of trees dried and dead and standing due to beetle infestation. We saw similar conditions in California a few years before where centenarian California oaks were dead- and that was before the drought! It takes little to ignite a megafire in such conditions, a fire whose size and extreme heat means that even normally fire-maintained ecosystems will be wiped out, taking thick barked mother trees along with brush, leaving nothing but charred ashes in its wake. Sparks from golf clubs (seriously), bullets shot in forested target practice or candled luminarias released into the air join lightening strikes and campfires at igniting forest fires. Increases in human habitation make controlled fires to clear out undergrowth unlikely. The increasingly hotter and more devastating megafires incur costs that no one budgets for and take the lives of the best-trained hot shots fighting the fires. The Sahara desert once was forested. So was the land around the now arid ruins of Mohenjo Daro. I had little understanding of how forests could just disappear before reading this book. But megafires are increasing all over the globe and as global warming proceeds rain is not captured in glaciers or ice caps to hydrate the summer soil. This leads to increasing drought and makes fire danger worse. Kodal himself trains to fight fires, and gives us the stories of wildfire fighters, some of whom were lost in fires so hot that they melted protective equipment. The son of a hot shot who learned from early childhood how to spot dangerous chimneys where fire could race down a hollow was killed trying to protect his neighbors. Worse yet, fire battalions using different radio protocols can not communicate, leaving evacuation orders unissued and requests for help unanswered.. As a country we are unprepared for these destructive fires, but we chafe at regulations prohibiting development in fire-sensitive country or even prohibiting shooting during fire danger periods. This is a great book that shows both fighting and ignoring fires as a policy is naive. We need individualized policies for different conditions and the financial resources to deal properly with the increasingly virulent megafires,

My sister is a volunteer fire fighter and fights the wildfires in California. This book paints a graphic picture of what she and all the other fire fighters who battle forest and mega fires go through to not only extinguish them, but to survive the fires. In the prologue Michael Kudas mentions that he found four categories of drivers behind the flames-- (1) the use and management of forests that led to an overload of vegetation plus invasive, introduced and exotic species that disrupted the historical cycle of fire, (2) booming development of flammable landscapes which provides another fuel load in the forms of homes and infrastructure along with forests filled with human-produced sparks and heats, (3) warming and drying climate primed many wild-lands to burn and expanded the fire seasons by months when few resources are available and finally (4) political and economic decisions drove the flames as often as they extinguished them. As I read the book and as I thought about the above four points in relationship to the current wildfires going on in California (this is in July of 2018) I thought - he's absolutely right. When you think about what he wrote on point number one--we have introduced more vegetation, different species etc. into our forests which during dry times adds more fuel to a fire. We have built our homes (#2) closer and closer and often in forests which in turn provide more fuel for fires. I do believe in climate change and do believe our planet is getting dryer which means as #3 states--additional months for fires to start, fires to burn and because they are outside the fire season often the resources to fight them are unavailable at a moment's notice. When you read the book the various chapters do address these issues. Michael Kudas is a good writer and as you read you can feel the fires creeping closer as he narrates the battles. You will also feel anger at times at politicians who seek to soothe instead of doing the right thing and being brutally honest about the fire and its ramifications. You'll feel the desperation at times of the hot shots who fight these fires. To me a good non-fiction book presents facts but also draws you into the narrative and makes you feel like you are there and Michael Kudas did this for me with this book. So a big thank you to all the firefighters and support personnel who battle to save our forests, our wildlife, our homes and cities and our people from these mega-fires!

This is a very interesting book. Michael Kudas has done extensive research on the history and causes of western wildfires. It seems like there is a lot of misinformation being spread around and this author tries to straighten things out with historical evidence. He considers important questions like, do forests that have been attacked by beetles burn faster or slower than healthy forests? It's an important question, and the answer depends on who you talk to. We need to get some people to study things like that and find out what is really going on, because the consequences of the current

state of chaos and misinformation are severe and tragic. The book covers the deaths of the 19 firefighters who died in the Yarnell fire near Prescott, Arizona. It documents all the details of what happened before, during and after the fire. What has been done since then to make sure this kind of tragedy never happens again? The fire department disbanded the "Hotshot" wildfire division, which was previously a model of a well-run firefighting operation. Why? Money. It was expensive, and the families sued them, so they just gave up. Now who is going to fight the big fires?

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