

azcentral.com
HEALTH · ENTERTAINMENT · CALENDAR · GAMING · TRAVEL · JOBS · CARS · REAL ESTATE · PHONE BOOK

---

**Sections** ▶

---

**Site Search**

 **GO**

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

online Edition

**FRONT PAGE** VALLEY & STATE SPORTS BUSINESS ARIZONA LIVING OPINIONS

CLASSIFIEDS | ADVERTISE | SUBSCRIBE | ARCHIVES | TALK BACK | HELP | REPUBLIC STORE | ABOUT US

**em**

SIGN SPEC VIA I

---

**SUNDAY SECTIONS**

- R&E
- JOBS ARIZONA
- TRAVEL
- VIEWPOINTS

**FEATURES SECTIONS**

- HOME
- FOOD & DRINK
- PREVIEW
- WHEELS

**LOCAL SECTIONS**

- AHUATUKEE
- CHANDLER
- TEMPE
- MESA
- GILBERT
- NORTHEAST
- SCOTTSDALE
- NORTH SCOTTSDALE
- SUN CITIES/SURPRISE
- GLENDALE/PEORIA
- NORTH PHOENIX
- CENTRAL PHOENIX
- SOUTHWEST VALLEY

**ON AZCENTRAL.COM**

- ENTERTAINMENT
- CALENDARS
- TRAVEL & OUTDOORS
- COMMUNITY STORIES
- GOLF
- HOME & GARDEN
- COMICS & GAMES
- OBITUARIES

**7 DAY ARCHIVE**

- SUNDAY
- MONDAY
- TUESDAY
- WEDNESDAY
- THURSDAY
- FRIDAY
- SATURDAY

REPUBLIC EDITORIALS

[SAVE THIS](#)
[EMAIL THIS](#)
[PRINT THIS](#)
[MOST POPULAR](#)

## Costly lawsuits provide kindling for forest blazes

**By Jeff Flake**  
June 25, 2002

Driving through evacuated Show Low last night, an illuminated sign at a vacant fast food restaurant reading "Everything's Peachy" was hard to miss. That phrase may have described the restaurant's new product line, but it is a far cry from the situation here in the White Mountains.

Having grown up in the area, I thought I would be prepared for the devastation as I toured the fire's perimeter. The destruction is much more complete than I thought possible. As of Monday, more than 300,000 acres have burned in "Rodeo-Chediski" fires alone, with the lightning season yet to come.

As serious as these fires have been, they only serve to warn of heightened fire devastation in the future.

While the fire still burns, it is not too early to take stock of how we got into this situation and consider what we must do to decrease the likelihood that these conditions will exist in the future. The current drought conditions are out of our hands, as they will be in the future. What is not out of our hands is the condition of our forests, and how conducive they will be to devastating fires when the next drought occurs.

Over the years, fire suppression coupled with a reduction in logging on the national forests and public lands have resulted in previously spacious forests now crammed with trees and dense underbrush. An acre of forest that used to hold only 50 trees now contains up to one hundred times as many. The increase in trees, combined with dry, hot weather and the drought, has made all of these trees and brush into a fuel load waiting to ignite. Due to the increased load, fires burn hotter and destroy more old-growth trees than if there had been smaller, more frequent controlled burns.

The Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) of Northern Arizona University is working to restore the forest and prevent crown-burning wildfires not

The Re

Edit the new edit con Ann Boa Urie Dok Ingl Mac Nils Pim Rot Rot Sch Val We: Ben

is working to restore the forest and prevent crown burning wildfires not indigenous to ponderosa pine by providing sound science to land managers for implementation.

Research by the ERI and Dr. Wally Covington shows that Southwestern ponderosa pine forests were open and parklike before Anglo-European settlement (approximately 1880).

Until the 1870s, natural light surface fires occurred every two to five years. Along with grass competition and regular drought, these fires helped to maintain an open and parklike landscape dominated by grasses, wildflowers and shrubs, with scattered groups of ponderosa pines.

After settlement, intense livestock grazing, fire suppression, logging practices and climatic events enabled dense pine regeneration and caused the previously open parklands to become denser. Consequently, fire behavior changed dramatically. These forests are increasingly vulnerable to unnatural stand-replacing crown fires.

Over the last 40 years the number, size and severity of fires has increased in the Southwest.

Forest thinning must occur to create a healthier forest that won't become a tightly knit pack of fuel for what otherwise could be a controllable fire. Prescribed burns can remove some of the fuel load, but it is necessary in some instances to cut and remove smaller trees mechanically.

It goes without saying that the funds generated from forest thinning will offset the funds needed to treat more of our forests.

The problem is, all you have to do is mention the words "commercial" and "forest" in the same breath and the local pseudo-environmentalist will file a lawsuit before you can finish your sentence.

The uncertainty caused by such lawsuits has decimated the logging industry in Arizona, and that has contributed heavily to the situation we find ourselves in today. It has been estimated that nearly 40 percent of our Forest Service's budget is swallowed up just fighting lawsuits filed by "environmentalists."

The bottom line is this: If we want to save what remains of our forests in Arizona, we've got to get a handle on the frivolous lawsuits that prevent us from doing so.

**U.S. Rep. Jeff Flake represents Arizona's 1st Congressional District. He was born and raised in Snowflake.**

## **MED** + *review*

*click here for medical information on:*

[Republic Front Page](#) | [Valley & State](#) | [Sports](#)  
[Arizona Living](#) | [Business](#) | [Opinions](#)

[Subscribe to The Republic](#)

[Terms of Service](#)

[Help Center](#) | [About us](#)

**Copyright 2002, The Arizona Republic. All rights reserved**  
**[Gannett Co. Inc.](#)**