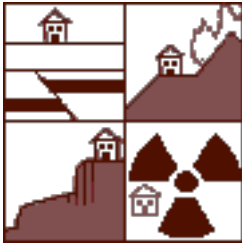


**CALIFORNIA STATE
UNIVERSITY, LONG BEACH**

**Geography 640
Seminar in Physical and
Environmental Geography**

**Spring 2019 Topic:
Hazards**

W 7-9:45 p.m., PH1-230



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Dr. Rodrigue
Geo. 640
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Content Analysis Debriefing—Western Wildfires: A Policy Change Perspective

Charles Davis (2006) presents a study that investigates wildfire suppression policy. With this he engages in content analysis of *New York Times* and Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports. The following are takeaway points and seminar discussion comments of this article:

- Purpose Statement: The objective of the article is clearly stated; Davis (2006) examines how and why wildfire policy changes occurred from 1980s to the early 2000s.
 - Davis does a good job in stating in the abstract and introduction his objective. Clearly he knew there had been a “shift” as he states, and wanted to know what had influenced the changes.
 - Main foci are changes the U.S. Forest Service agency policies undergo and wildfire management perception influence.
- Importance of the study: Some assume policymaking has minimum political influence.

- Davis (2006) gives significance to his study by challenging popular assumptions and highlights how political climate and external pressures induce policy change.
- Data/Data collection: Davis uses secondary data for his analysis.
 - He examines historical federal wildfire policies, GAO reports, and NY Time wildfire stories.
 - Davis shows in Table 1. in the article the number of years from the NY Times he analyzed, 1985-2003 and 1990-2004 for GAO reports.
 - The data collected from the NY Times is searched directly on the NY Times using the key terms “fires,” and “wildfires,” as well as fire policy related stories.
- Methodology: Davis uses various methods to evaluate the changes in wildfire policies.
 - The first method is the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) that analyzes changes that may have been influenced by from external factors such as new governing groups (2006).
 - The second method he uses is the punctuated equilibrium (PE) approach, which evaluates the negative image or perception outlets such as the media have given to policies or governing groups.
- Results/Authors Conclusion: Davis’ results and conclusions come from the historical review of federal documents, newspaper stories and GAO reports.
 - Historical records state government agencies casted doubt on “Paiute forestry,” and other wildfire suppression practices.
 - This was done using media and political pressure.
 - Agencies also used their own scientists to cast doubt in existing policies at that time, which then proved to be wrong.
 - Davis briefly discusses the tone media coverage had towards “failing policies,” and motivated government officials to take action.

- Pressure led on by media led GAO reports set a new role for politics in wildfire management.
 - New policies were created resulting timber logging/harvesting increase and evolution of wildfire suppression practices.
 - December 3, 2003: President Bush signs the Healthy Forest Restoration Act (ironically not for the well being of forests).
 - “The combined effects of focusing events, media and GAO attention, constituency pressures, and the subsequent ability of President Bush and his supporters to take advantage of the open political window made it possible to significantly alter federal wildfire programs despite a long history of agency autonomy within this policy arena,” (Davis 2006, 125).
- Convincing and Clarity:
 - Davis is clear and concise when explaining the historical context/background to his research.
 - Explains and supports how the USFS takes over land management and then loses it over time due to media and outside pressures.
 - He has a good reason and states the need and importance of the study.
 - To evaluate influential factors that caused policy change.
 - He also defines where he gets his data from, but does not spend as much time as he should discussing the media data and GAO data.
 - Originality of methodology: Although lots of researchers conduct research and use content analysis as a method, I believe Davis’ work holds originality by having a good historical walkthrough, explaining wildfire land management policy evolution, and tying into a more recent time in which he was conducting his study.

Reference

Davis, Charles. 2006. Western wildfires: A policy change perspective. *Review of Policy Research*. 23(1): 115-127. doi: 10.1111/j 1541-1338.2006.00188.x.