

Working Together to Improve Forest Health in the Sacramento River Watershed



The Sacramento River Watershed

The Sacramento River is the largest river and watershed system in California. It carries 31% of the state's total surface water runoff, provides drinking water for California, supplies farmers with the lifeblood of the state's agricultural industry, and provides vital habitat for hundreds of fish and wildlife species. From the Sierra forests to the valley, it is the place where we live, work, and play. It is imperative that we protect this valuable resource for today's needs as well as for future generations.

Forest Health in the Sacramento River Watershed

Healthy forests provide numerous watershed benefits including clean air and water, habitat for wildlife, recreational opportunities, renewable energy, wood products, and more. Many of our forests are overgrown, unmanaged and facing widespread tree mortality making them susceptible to disease and intense wildfire so that these benefits are being diminished. There is broad consensus that science-based ecological restoration of our forests must be dramatically increased. While there is an immense need and a strong desire to implement forest management efforts including controlled burns, managed wildfire, mechanical thinning and pest treatments, there are numerous barriers and challenges to utilizing these tools.

Sacramento River Watershed Program and Butte County Fire Safe Council

In 2017, the Sacramento River Watershed Program (SRWP) and the Butte County Fire Safe Council (BCFSC) signed an MOU to work with the Community Wildfire Protection Plan Working Group and other stakeholders to access, integrate, and use data and information to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration via strategic planning efforts. SRWP is a nonprofit organization that works with watershed communities and



Wildfire burning in chaparral in the Sacramento River Watershed in western Tehama County.

local, state and federal partners to leverage and incorporate watershed management efforts along with the latest knowledge and tools to identify and cooperatively address resource issues. The BCFSC works with partners to improve forest health and reduce wildfire severity through wildfire hazard education and mitigation. Together we are working to develop cooperative, cross-boundary forest health improvement projects that are compatible with other plans and programs.



Landscape Level Planning and Restoration

Forest restoration and management should be implemented strategically at the landscape-level to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. Implementing restoration efforts across the landscape is more effective than isolated restoration projects and yields multiple watershed benefits. Large-scale planning and restoration efforts require more collaboration among local, state and federal agencies, and private landowners. SRWP and the BCFSC are working with partners including CAL FIRE, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, USFS, Fire Safe Councils, and Resource Conservation Districts on projects to reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health in Butte County's forested watersheds. Demonstrating and promoting successful strategic planning and restoration efforts at the county level will validate the model for work on the larger landscape and build the case for increased investment and support.

Creating a Shared Understanding Of Our Forested Watersheds

Knowing the condition of our forests is critical to responsibly managing them. A key constraint to effective, comprehensive forest management is the lack of accessible information and data to support timely and science-based decision-making. SRWP has partnered with 34 North, a data and software development company for the environmental services industry, to develop solutions that will increase the capacity, efficiency, and effectiveness of watershed management and restoration activities. The Sacramento River Watershed Data Program (SRWDP, <http://data.sacriver.org/>) engages stakeholders on a web-based platform to gather information about forest conditions, key infrastructure, priorities, projects and more. The SRWDP works with collaborating agencies and organizations to gather and display data and information in an easy to understand watershed view

of forest conditions and management activities. Data is managed at the regional level and shared with all stakeholders for strategic landscape-level planning and implementation of forest health improvements.

Investment in Watershed Management

These efforts represent a tiny fraction of a watershed in need of major investment, but their implications are far reaching. Not only will these collaborative efforts improve forest health by controlling and eradicating invasive species, restoring habitat, and minimizing catastrophic fire, they will help to increase public awareness of the role forests play in protecting critical water supplies for humans and the environment. We are working with stakeholders to demonstrate the relationship between upstream conditions and downstream impacts in the valley and the Delta and build the case for why watershed management is essential for protecting, restoring and maintaining healthy ecosystems and must be supported.



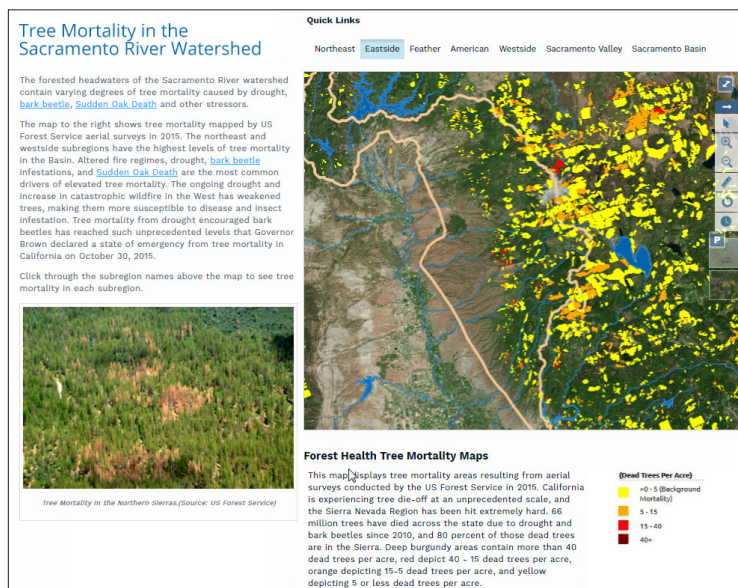
www.sacriver.org



www.34north.com



www.buttefiresafe.net



(Top) A 2018 control burn near Forest Ranch, CA

(Above) A sample map and overlay from the Sacramento River Watershed Data Portal (<http://data.sacriver.org/projects/3849>)