

# Deaths climb in California national forests

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

Yosemite National Park has gotten all the attention for a spike in visitor deaths this year. But fatalities also are up on national forest lands throughout California, such as an expert kayaker who drowned in a remote creek near Sonora.

Data provided by the U.S. Forest Service show there have been 27 deaths in 18 national forests in the state through Aug. 15, the most recent data available.

That is about equal to the total number of deaths in each of the last three full calendar years, said Stanton Floria, a spokesman for the Forest Service's Pacific Southwest Region, which is based in Vallejo and oversees all the California forests.

"We have been noticing a trend toward more injuries and fatalities," Floria said. "We're already at the point where we've been in past years, and we haven't concluded the year yet, so that's fairly telling."

The *Bee* reported in August about a similar deadly trend at Yosemite, after prominent incidents at Half Dome and Vernal Fall. Since then, six more people have died at Yosemite, bringing the park's total for the year to 20 fatalities.

As at Yosemite, many of the deaths on forest lands are water-related, including instances in which people were swept into creeks and drowned.

"This might be a result of a link to the heavy snow year, with heavier and longer runoffs," John Chang, chairman of the California Mountain Rescue Association, said via email. The

addition of a mild summer may have “led to more people being caught off guard.”

Some of the deaths are connected to extreme sports.

**Read the whole story**