

Rim Fire's intensity takes toll on ecosystem

By Bettina Boxall, Los Angeles Times

Standing on ridges miles away from the Rim Fire, John Buckley has traced the path of the huge Sierra Nevada blaze by watching fire clouds billowing above the Stanislaus National Forest.

The view has been sobering. As the Rim blaze burns its way into the record books, Buckley thinks it is roasting some of the last remaining old-growth stands in the Stanislaus forest, incinerating thousands of acres of young trees planted at a cost of millions of dollars after massive 1987 fires and destroying important nesting areas for California spotted owls and goshawks.



The Rim Fire near Yosemite is one of the largest in California's history.
Photo/CBS Sacramento

The extent of ecological damage from the Rim fire won't be known until after it dies out and crews survey the burn area. But given the intensity of the blaze and 200-foot-tall walls of flame shooting up canyons, Buckley and others expect nothing to be left on big patches of mountain chaparral areas

and timberland.

“It’s making these incredible hot runs where it’s literally wiping out the forest,” said Buckley, an ex-firefighter for the U.S. Forest Service and head of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center, which has worked for more than two decades to protect the region’s ecosystem.

For a variety of reasons, the region is one of the most burned in the Sierra.

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