

Debating what to do with all the wood in the forests

By Lauren Sommer, NPR

The record-breaking wildfire in Yosemite National Park is almost fully contained, two months after it started. The blaze calls attention to a problem across the Western U.S. – after a century having its fires routinely extinguished, the forests are overloaded with fuel.

A heated debate has flared up about what do to with that forest fuel. California is hoping to reduce its fire risk through renewable energy, but some worry about the environmental costs of thinning the forests.

The forest right after a big fire is incredibly quiet. There are no birds. No bugs. No pine needles rustling in the breeze. Just row after row of blackened trees. Their bark feels like charcoal.

At more than 400 square miles, the Rim Fire is the largest Sierra Nevada fire in recorded history.

For decades, the Forest Service tried to put out every fire by 10 in the morning after it started. Small trees grew in, and during the Rim Fire they became ladders, carrying flames up to the tree tops and leaving just charred trunks. But just across the road, it looks entirely different.

Brett Storey thinks there's a solution. He's a program manager for Placer County and he's showing me around a recycling facility between Tahoe City and Truckee.

The plant would turn tree branches and scrap into a gas that runs a generator, supplying about 1,500 homes with electricity. It would be fueled by Forest Service projects

within 30 miles.

Read the whole story