

# Overgrown Sierra forests gulping water

By J.N. Sbranti, Modesto Bee

Numerous billion-dollar proposals to create more water storage in California are competing for attention and funding during this third year of drought.

But there may be a less-expensive way to increase water flows: Start thinning out the overgrown Sierra Nevada forests.

Cutting down trees may not sound environmentally friendly, but researchers from UC Merced and elsewhere think that may be just what's needed to restore forest health and increase water runoff.

"It's one of the lower-cost options (to increase California's water supply) ... and it also would reduce the probability of big destructive fires," said Roger Bales, a UC Merced engineering professor who specializes in mountain hydrology. "There could be measurable and significant gains" – a hypothesized 9 percent increase in snowmelt runoff – if the forests are properly thinned.

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