

Pine tree-killing beetles thrive in drought

By Lewis Griswold, Fresno Bee

PINEHURST – A massive die-off of pine trees in the southern Sierra Nevada caused by beetles attacking drought-stressed trees is turning forests brown and creating a fire tinderbox.

From El Portal in Mariposa County to Kernville in Kern County and beyond, stands of dead trees are striking fear in the hearts of mountain residents.

“You drive around and it’s all around us,” said Lee Duncan, who lives in Miramonte in Fresno County near Pinehurst. “It’s like a gasoline can everywhere.”

About the only hope in halting the die-off is for the drought to end, an unlikely occurrence this year as winter ended with perhaps the lowest Sierra snowpack on record.

As a fourth year of drought looms, mountain residents are stuck with the cost of removing dead trees next to their homes and loggers fault the U.S. Forest Service for not allowing them to thin forests. But forest managers say the tree die-off might help Mother Nature.

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