

# Living with devastating reality of year-round fire season

By Julia Prodis Sulek, San Jose Mercury News

BISHOP – The fire came up quickly here in the eastern Sierra Nevada, destroying 35 homes and taking the mountainside community of Swall Meadows by surprise. Who would expect a roiling wildfire – throwing fireballs and whipping up flame whirls through 7,000 acres of sagebrush, piñon and Jeffrey pine – in the dead of winter?

“Three years before, I had 12 feet of snow at my house on that exact date in February,” said volunteer Fire Chief Dale Schmidt, whose Wheeler Crest station in the remote Swall Meadows neighborhood is surrounded by carcasses of burned homes. “Four years ago, they would have had a couple to 3 feet of snow where the fire started. That’s the mental state people were in: Winter is not the season for fire danger.”

As California enters its fourth year of drought, communities across the West are confronting a new reality – a year-round fire season. Perhaps nowhere are the consequences as obvious as in Swall Meadows, where the 300 residents are now shoveling ash instead of snow.

**Read the whole story**