

Study: Sierra wildfires worse with climate change

By Henry Gass, Christian Science Monitor

Wildfires in California are burning at increasingly higher elevations, according to a study, with scientists saying the phenomenon is another signal of approaching climate change that could also have implications for how forests are restored after fires.



The Washington Fire this summer for several days threatened the town of Markleeville. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn E. Wright

The study, which analyzed 105 years of data, found that forest fires in the Sierra Nevada mountains rarely burned above the 8,000-foot elevation early in the 20th century. Fuel for fires were typically dryer and more abundant at lower elevations, but over the past three decades several fires each year have burned at or above the 8,000-foot elevation.

Mark Schwartz – lead author of the study and also director of the John Muir Institute of the Environment at the UC Davis – described the increase of higher-elevation forest fires as

“yet another harbinger of climate change” in a statement released with the study.

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