

Partnership to test if forest thinning can grow groundwater

By Edward Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

The purchase of 10,000 acres of watershed land west of Lake Tahoe is slated to launch a living laboratory testing whether the answer to drought lies in fewer trees.

Research by the environmental group the Nature Conservancy has shown that thinning forests of small- to medium-size trees and bushes allows forests to trap more rain because it lets more water run off to streams and into groundwater stores. In winter, thinned areas may also allow more snow to be deposited on the forest floor as snowpack, said Edward Smith, a forest ecologist with the Nature Conservancy.

The Palo Alto-based Northern Sierra Partnership, which includes the conservancy, seeks to put that theory into practice on former logging land it's bought for \$10.1 million about 10 miles west of Lake Tahoe and south of Interstate 80 in Placer County. It's one of the largest pieces of unprotected land south of Donner Summit and the Tahoe National Forest.

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