

Study: Western wildfires threaten water supplies

By Bill Theobald, USA Today

WASHINGTON – The risk of severe wildfires in the West also threatens the region’s increasingly scarce water supply, a study finds.

The study, released Wednesday by the American Forest Foundation, highlights that wildfires are not just a public lands issue. Private and family lands also are at high risk, the study found, and much of that land is in critical watersheds.

“Unless we figure out how to treat all the lands ... we are all at risk,” said Tom Martin, president and CEO of the foundation, noting that efforts to maintain healthy forests as a fire-prevention measure have focused mostly on public lands.

He said the foundation, which promotes stewardship by family forest owners, launched the study because it wanted to learn more about how the two biggest issues in the West right now – water shortages caused by extreme drought and the severe wildfire season – are related.

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