

Study: Drought could worsen fires, feed insects, spur plant die-offs

By Peter Fimrite, San Francisco Chronicle

Worsening drought conditions may be doing more damage to forests in California and throughout the West than their ecosystems can handle, causing a spiral of death that could have a devastating impact on land managers, a U.S. Forest Service study concludes.

The 300-page report issued Monday – “Effects of Drought on Forests and Rangelands in the United States” – outlines how hotter, drier and more extreme weather will spark massive insect outbreaks, tree and plant die-offs, bigger and more costly wildfires, and economic impacts to timber and rangeland habitat.

The study by 77 scientists from the Forest Service, universities, non-governmental organizations and national labs seeks to bring together years of peer-reviewed research and provide the best science to forest and rangeland managers as they grapple with the effects of climate change on the 193 million acres of national forest. There are 21 million acres in California’s 18 national forests.

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