

California losing most land to development

By Paul Rogers, Mercury News

The natural landscape of the American West is gradually disappearing under a relentless march of new subdivisions, roads, oil and gas production, agricultural operations and other human development, according to a detailed mapping study released Tuesday.

From 2001 to 2011, an area totaling 4,321 square miles – or 15 times the size of San Jose, Oakland and San Francisco combined – was modified by development in the 11 Western states, the report found, with California losing the most natural land, and Wyoming and Utah changing at the fastest rate.

“We are nibbling away at our wild places at a fairly rapid clip,” said Mike Dombeck, former chief of the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in the 1990s.

The report was produced by scientists at Conservation Science Partners, a nonprofit research organization based in Truckee, who spent a year analyzing more than 30 large databases and a decade of satellite images over Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

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