

# Opinion: Restoring forests to tame wildfires means more water

By Richard Bailey, Fresno Bee

Californians have the ability to greatly reduce the likelihood of wildfire devastation in the Sierra Nevada. Making the forests a safe, healthy resource again may seem impossible, but forest restoration in other states is already producing excellent results. Besides cleaner air, healthy woodlands come with the benefit of higher levels of runoff water available to local farms and cities – exactly what our thirsty state needs.

A hundred years of fire suppression in an effort to protect homes and cities near wooded areas has created dense stands of trees and brush – kindling for the megafires in the Central Sierra for the last decade, causing long-term damage to our forests and watersheds. Restoration in the Central Sierra promises smaller, less-destructive fires, more snowmelt, improved air quality and jobs.

“Restoration” refers to the combined thinning of trees and brush, to produce healthy forests aiming for densities of about 100 years ago. Idaho, Arizona, North Dakota, Hawaii, Wyoming, Kansas and Washington are using such programs, and California appears ready to follow suit.

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