

Study: Sierra meadows being overtaken by forest

By Jason Alvarez, UC Merced

Subalpine meadows are among the Sierra Nevada's most enchantingly picturesque landscapes. These sparsely wooded, grassy expanses are home to plants and animals found nowhere else, and they play an important role in regulating the flow of water from the Sierra snowpack to the rest of the state.

But these ecosystems may soon disappear.

A UC Merced study authored by former doctoral student Kaitlin Lubetkin, Professor Leroy Westerling and Sierra Nevada Research Institute scientist Lara Kueppers found that these meadows are being increasingly overrun by forest as changing conditions allow the offspring of nearby trees to take hold in meadow environments that previously favored shrubs and grasses over saplings. For the many species that depend on meadows, this change may force them to find new habitats.

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