

# WILDFIRE AWARENESS WEEK

May 4-10, 2014

Healthy forests filter our water, clean our air, store carbon, provide habitat and recreation, and support sustainable jobs and communities. Unfortunately, many Sierra Nevada forests are overgrown and unhealthy, and the Region is at high risk for more megafires like 2013's Rim Fire. Fire is a natural part of the Sierra Nevada ecosystem, but the current conditions are anything but natural. Even the outstanding fire suppression system we have in California is unable to respond adequately to wildfires in forests that are so badly overgrown. These megafires have significant negative impacts on people and communities, water quality and quantity, air quality, habitat, and recreation. Some key points to be aware of include the following:

- Megafires have become much more common in the last decade—**the average size of a fire today is nearly five times the average fire from the 1970s**, and the severity is increasing. The Sierra Nevada is at especially high risk this year with only one-third of normal snowpack as a result of the drought.
- Large damaging fires negatively impact the air we breathe. Early estimates indicate that **the Rim Fire released 11,352,608 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions – equivalent to the annual emissions from 2.3 million cars**. In addition, air quality warnings were issued for Lake Tahoe, Carson City, and Reno - more than 100 miles away – as a result of the Rim Fire smoke.
- Fire is a major contributor to **sediment that reduces storage capacity** and the amount of water available for urban and agricultural users around the state. At a time when storage capacity is critically needed, it is even more important to restore health to avoid this consequence.
- Large intense fires wreak havoc on wildlife habitat. According to the Stanislaus National Forest, **the Rim Fire destroyed 74% of the area's known Great Gray Owl nests, and 20% of the area's spotted owl territories were lost**.

**Restoring our forests to ecological health makes sense for a number of reasons, including economic.**

*Last month, we joined The Nature Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service in releasing a new study that shows that investing in proactive forest management activities can save up to three times the cost of future fires, reduce high-severity fire by up to 75 percent, and bring added benefits for people, water, and wildlife.*

There is an urgent need to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, especially on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. USFS Regional Forester Randy Moore has indicated a **need to increase the restoration pace by 3 to 4 times**.

For additional information please contact:

*Brittany Covich, Sierra Nevada Conservancy*  
(530) 823-4686

[Brittany.Covich@sierranevada.ca.gov](mailto:Brittany.Covich@sierranevada.ca.gov)

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy is a state agency that carries out a mission of protecting the environment and economy in a complementary fashion across 25 million acres, one-quarter of the state. To learn more, please visit the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Web site.



11521 Blocker Dr., Suite 205 Auburn, CA 95603

(530)823-4670 (877)251-1212

[sierranevada.ca.gov](http://sierranevada.ca.gov)

