

Working Forests, Forest Health and Management Challenges in the Redwood Region¹

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Abstract

As California continues into a fifth year of drought, tree mortality enhanced by the unprecedented bark beetle epidemic contributes to wildfires that continue to increase in frequency and severity. Recent fires have posed increasing fire suppression challenges, life safety concerns, post fire watershed impacts and lasting damage to forested landscapes. The ability of California forestlands to sequester and store carbon has become a matter of national and international significance. Greenhouse gas emissions to the atmosphere are altering the climate, and public and private land managers play a major role in climate adaptation and mitigation responses. Nearly a century of fire exclusion in California, coupled with other management decisions on both private and public land, has resulted in forests that are at an increasing risk of loss due to large-scale disturbances. These high risk conditions cause our forests to be susceptible to catastrophic wildfire and epidemic levels of tree mortality due to drought and insect attacks, both of which are forecasted to get worse with a warmer and drier climate. Rather than being the reliable carbon sink they should be, our forests are now in some years emitting carbon.

Ultimately, to counter these trends, forest managers need to significantly increase the pace and scale of the region's forest restoration work, such as prescribed fire. In response to the myriad of state forest health issues, California is actively engaged with efforts such as the Tree Mortality Task Force, the Forest Climate Action Team, Assembly Bill 1492 Multi-Agency Forest Practice coordination, cooperative research and ongoing collaborative efforts to address land use changes such as timberland conversion and urbanization. No single activity is going to solve the wide range of threats to California's forests. It is going to take a balanced approach of all the management options available. Without a balanced and cooperative effort on behalf of all landowners, land managers, stakeholders and special interests, we run the risk of future generations not being able to experience or enjoy the benefits of the forests we enjoy today.

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