

NEWS RELEASE

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Sierra Nevada Forests: California's Climate Hero or Villain?

Fourth Annual Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program Summit to focus on greenhouse gas impacts of wildfires and tree mortality

(AUBURN, Calif.) – Sierra Nevada forests should be absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and storing it as carbon, helping to offset emissions in California. However, recent large, damaging wildfires and unprecedented levels of tree mortality are jeopardizing that important service.

Tomorrow, leaders and representatives from state and federal agencies, rural counties, and tribes will gather in Sacramento to discuss the impacts that drought, wildfires, and insects are having on the forests of the Sierra Nevada, and what those impacts mean for California's greenhouse gas reduction goals.

"California is making a lot of decisions about how to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to a changing climate," says Jim Branham, Executive Officer for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. "Unhealthy forests; large, damaging wildfires; and extreme levels of tree mortality release greenhouse gas emissions instead of offsetting them, and may make many of our other efforts less effective."

The group will gather for the fourth annual Sierra Nevada Watershed Improvement Program (WIP) Summit, an event hosted by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy to share recent research about the state of forest and watershed health in the Sierra Nevada region and provide updates on progress made under the WIP. The WIP is a large-scale restoration program co-led by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy and the U.S. Forest Service, and supported by a broad range of stakeholders interested in increasing the pace and scale of restoration across the Sierra Nevada region to meet California's climate goals.

Summit presenters will include Steven Ostoja, Director of the USDA California Climate Hub; Ashley Conrad-Saydah, Deputy Secretary for Climate Policy from the California Environmental Protection Agency; Eli Ilano, Forest Supervisor for the Tahoe National Forest; and Chief Ken Pimlott, Director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

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The Summit will be broadcast live online and can be accessed at www.restorethesierra.org. Additional details about the state of forest carbon in the Sierra Nevada can be found at www.sierranevada.ca.gov.

About the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Created in 2004, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy (SNC) is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC has awarded nearly \$60 million in grants for projects to protect and enhance the health of California's primary watersheds by improving forest health; remediating mercury contamination from abandoned mines; protecting critical natural resources; and reducing the risk of large, damaging wildfires. Funding for these projects came from Proposition 84 passed by voters in 2006 and Proposition 1 passed by voters in 2014.

The Sierra Nevada Region spans 25 million acres, encompasses all or part of 22 counties, and runs from the Oregon border on the north to Kern County on the south. The Region is the origin of more than 60 percent of California's developed water supply.

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