



**For Immediate Release:  
April 10, 2014**

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**Study: Investing in forests reduces megafires and saves millions**  
*Cost-benefit analysis in Sierra Nevada shows savings of up to 3 times to pay for treatments up front*

**San Francisco, CA** — A new study released today finds 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.

“Recent megafires in California and the West have destroyed lives and property, degraded water quality, damaged wildlife habitat, and cost taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars,” said David Edelson, Sierra Nevada Project Director with The Nature Conservancy. “This study shows that, by investing now in Sierra forests, we can reduce risks, safeguard water quality, and recoup up to three times our initial investment while increasing the health and resilience of our forests.”

The Mokelumne Watershed Avoided Cost Analysis examines the costs and benefits of reducing the risk of high-severity forest fires through proactive techniques like thinning and controlled burns. Set in the central Sierra Nevada, just north of last year’s destructive Rim Fire, scientists modeled likely future wildfires with and without proactive fuel treatments. The results indicate that investing in healthy forests can significantly reduce the size and intensity of fires and save millions of dollars in structure loss, carbon released, and improved firefighting safety and costs.

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. “Many scientists are predicting an increase in the size and severity of fires due to a changing climate,” said Jim Branham, Executive Officer of the Sierra Nevada Conservancy. “These fires, such as last year’s Rim Fire, degrade wildlife habitat, release massive amounts of greenhouse gasses, and can result in many other adverse impacts.”

Last year, the U.S. Forest Service spent \$1 billion to cover firefighting shortfalls, taking money from programs that fund activities designed to reduce the risk of such fires. New

bipartisan legislation called the Wildfire Funding Disaster Act seeks to address this problem by creating a reserve fund dedicated to excess firefighting costs, similar to the way FEMA provides funds to respond to other natural disasters.

“Our ongoing goal is to increase the pace and scale of our restoration work and this study strongly supports that,” said Randy Moore, U.S. Forest Service Pacific Southwest Regional Forester. “Our current pace of restoration work needs to be accelerated to mitigate threats and disturbances such as wildfires, insects, diseases and climate change impacts. The goal is to engage in projects that restore at least 500,000 acres per year. Many types of projects help us reach our restoration goals including mechanical vegetation treatments, prescribed fire, and managing wildfire for resource benefits.”

The study is authored by the U.S. Forest Service, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, and The Nature Conservancy and was developed in consultation with a broad range of local and regional stakeholders. It concludes that the benefits from proactive forest management are 2-3 times the costs of fire fighting and that increasing investments in such activities would benefit federal and state taxpayers, property owners (and their insurers), and timber companies.

For more information on the Mokelumne Avoided Cost Analysis, or to download the study, please visit [www.sierranevada.ca.gov](http://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 over \$50 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 catastrophic wildfire. Funding for these projects comes from Proposition 84 passed by voters in 2006.*

#### ***About The Nature Conservancy***

*The Nature Conservancy is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide. Visit The Nature Conservancy on the Web at [www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org).*

#### ***About The U.S. Forest Service***

*The mission of the Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. The agency has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the*

*850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live. <http://www.fs.usda.gov/r5/>*

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