

# NEWS RELEASE

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Contact: Pete Dufour  
(530) 823-4668  
[pdufour@sierranevada.ca.gov](mailto:pdufour@sierranevada.ca.gov)



## **Bioenergy, Forest Fires to be Discussed at Sept. 12 Sierra Nevada Conservancy Board Meeting in Sequoia National Park**

**(Auburn)** – The impact of forest fires in the Sierra will be among the issues discussed as the Sierra Nevada Conservancy’s (SNC) Governing Board meets in the Sequoia National Park Sept. 11-12.

“The record breaking 2013 fire season underscores the need to return our forests to ecological health so that they provide clean water, clean air, and the many other benefits we’ve come to love about our forests,” said SNC Executive Officer Jim Branham. “We need to increase the pace and scale of forest treatment and promote forest biomass facilities to utilize the material that needs to be removed.”

The SNC is identified in the state’s 2012 Bioenergy Action Plan as one of the key responsible agencies for assisting collaborative efforts related to the development of community-scale forest bioenergy facilities.

The SNC will also issue a “system indicators” report at the board meeting, which indicates the threat of severe wildfire continues to grow in the Sierra Nevada. The fire threat for more than two-thirds of the Sierra ranges from “high” to “extreme” danger. Eighty-four percent of the “Wildland-Urban Interface” is in the same category.

According to the California Board of Forestry, five of the worst fire seasons on record have occurred since the turn of the century. This year’s fire season is expected to make that list. This summer’s Rim Fire that burned into Yosemite National Park is the largest fire ever to occur in the Sierra. Eleven of the 20 largest fires in California history have occurred in the past 10 years.

Costs to suppress these wildfires have averaged approximately \$1.2 billion per year. Many predict larger and more severe forest fires unless increased forest restoration treatments are implemented. These treatments will involve removing the excess biomass ‘fuel’ built up in the forests.

“By establishing small bioenergy facilities in several communities in the Sierra, forest waste can be burned more efficiently than in slash piles in the forest, and will provide local communities with jobs and economic benefits,” Branham said. “This is one solution we can all support.”

In 2010, the SNC launched its Sierra Nevada Forest and Community Initiative, calling for collaboration among various environmental, business, and government

agencies to restore public forests to ecological health, reduce the threat and consequences of large damaging fires, while benefitting local Sierra economies.

All 22 county boards of supervisors signed on to the initiative.

At 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, Sept. 11, members of the board will also participate in a field trip to Halstead Meadow and Giant Forest to view restoration projects. These projects demonstrate similar benefits and techniques as other SNC funded efforts located far in the backcountry of the parks.

The board meeting will take place at Wuksachi Lodge, in the Wuksachi Room, 64740 Wuksachi Way in Sequoia National Park at 9 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 12.

The public is invited to attend all SNC events; however, lunch and transportation are not provided. For more information on the field trip, contact Theresa Burgess, (530) 823-4672.

#### ***About the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Governing Board***

*Created in 2004, the Sierra Nevada Conservancy is a state agency whose mission is to improve the environmental, economic, and social well-being of the Sierra Nevada Region. The SNC, which receives no general fund tax dollars, has awarded approximately \$50 million in grants for projects including fuels reduction, conservation easements and acquisitions, and watershed and habitat restoration. Funding for these projects comes from Proposition 84 passed by voters in 2006.*

*The SNC Governing Board meets quarterly around the Sierra Nevada Region, which spans 25 million acres, encompasses all or part of 22 counties and runs from the Oregon border on the north, to southeast of Bakersfield.*

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