

Man to blame for poor forest health

Posted: Wednesday, October 1, 2014 9:30 am

Our forests, including Sequoia National Forest, are in peril and the main culprit for that is man.

While the drought is conveniently used as an excuse for the catastrophic forest fires we have seen this summer and last summer, more to blame is years of neglect of our forests to the point where today most areas of the Sierra Nevada mountain range are overgrown, in poor health and at risk for the very fires that have made headlines.

A new report by the Sierra Nevada Conservancy found that most of the Sierra Nevada forests are in critical condition and because of that, not only are they at risk to fire, but also at risk is clean water, clean air and a safe habitat for thousands of species.

The Sierra Nevada region covers 25 million acres and all or part of 22 counties, including Tulare County. The report found that overgrowth of our forests is the biggest risk for catastrophic fires. There is simply too much fuel in the forest. The reason for that overgrowth is man and successful efforts by some to stop all management of our forest, especially efforts to thin forest which will make them healthier for the trees and wildlife, and less susceptible to catastrophic fire.

There have been numerous efforts by the U.S. Forest Service to address the problem, nearly all blocked by those who are dead-set against removing timber from the forests. Even removing burned and dead timber from less than 10 percent of the 260,000 acres burned by the Rim Fire last year is being litigated by environmentalists who would rather see those trees rot and be replaced by bushes.

The call for action by the Conservancy is real and should be heeded by politicians and others in Sacramento and Washington, D.C. We cannot afford any more Rim Fires and we certainly never want to see a catastrophic fire in our own forests.

The time to restore the health of our forests is now.