

Controlled Burns in The Sierra

How a multi-agency effort aims to restore the health of the forest.

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A cool mountain breeze, birds chirping and the distant sound of a few chainsaws. That's the scene this Spring day nearby Shaver Lake, but as anyone who lives in the mountains knows it only takes one spark for all this to change in an instant.

"How do we have the same sense of urgency to restore our forest health before the trees die, before we have the big fire?" comments Jim Branham, Executive Officer with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy.

The group is assembled on these forested slopes along with multiple other agencies to discuss how to manage these scared forests, and how to do so as quickly as possible.

"Never to this extent has this region suffered from this degree of tree mortality." says Dean Gould with the Sierra National Forest.

"In 2015 the forest service harvested across the nation, 2.5 billion board feet of timber, okay. Within the Southern Sierras alone 10 billion board feet of timber are dead." adds Ramiro Rojas also with the Sierra National Forest.

The sense of urgency up here is increasing, and the best examples of such seen in both the taking down of trees between private and public lands as well as prescribed burns.

"All of our projects are coordinated, CalFire will generally do prescribed fire on private lands and then we will abut our projects, or connect our projects, to prescribed fires that are on the forest service." says Chris Water with CalFire.

You may have seen smoke on these slopes from last week's prescribed burn, conducted by CalFire. The next prescribed fire, lighting up on Monday and conducted by the Sierra National Forest.

The two agencies working in harmony with the Valley Air District to ensure burning at times with minimal impacts says Jim Branham.

"There's going to be smoke in the air, we can either put it up during controlled circumstances at the right time of year, or we can let the major fire come and put much more smoke up in the atmosphere at the wrong time of year, and when we can't control it."

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