

Sierra Nevada Framework

California has experienced its worst wildfire season on record with over 1.2 million acres burned in 2008. This comes on top of the nearly 1.1 million acres burned in 2007. These wildfires are having immense environmental, fiscal and public health impacts. The state and federal agencies spent over \$1 billion fighting last summer's blazes, which is 10 times the amount spent on hazardous fuels reduction efforts in California. From Bakersfield to Redding, a distance of nearly 450 miles, local residents were encouraged to stay indoors many days last summer due to air pollution readings up to 10 times the federal standard.

Forest health conditions in the Sierra Nevada continue to deteriorate as hazardous fuel levels increase, the climate continues to become drier, and efforts to thin overstocked forests remain paralyzed by litigation. The Forest Service's management plan for these 11.5 million acres of forests, known as the Sierra Nevada Framework, has been in and out of court since 2001. In 2004, the Forest Service revised the 2001 plan by better recognizing that forest management activities will be needed to reduce fire danger, improve wildlife habitat and protect communities. The plan called for commercial thinning activities on 700,000 acres, or 6% of federal forests, over the next 20 years to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and protect local communities. The plan includes a diameter limit to ensure old growth remains protected. <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/snfpa/>

Implementation of the plan is currently mired in Ninth Circuit courts by litigants who oppose all commercial thinning activities. The new Administration and Congress should recognize the need for increased thinning activities in the Sierra Nevada in light of the worsening crisis in California's forests. Further, preference should be given to mechanical treatments to reduce air pollution from prescribed burning.

Recommendation:

The Forest Service should be directed to implement the 2004 Sierra Nevada Framework and to resist pressures to return to the 2001 Framework.

The American Forest Resource Association (AFRC), headquartered in Portland, Oregon, represents nearly 80 forest products businesses and forest landowners in twelve states, primarily in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho and Montana. Its mission is to create a favorable operating environment for the forest products industry, ensure a reliable timber supply from public and private lands, and promote sustainable management of forests by improving federal laws, regulations, policies and decisions that determine or influence the management of all lands. For information, call 503-222-9505.

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