

MOVING INTO THE FUTURE: PLANNING FOR WILDFIRES IN THE SIERRA NEVADA REGION

Following another dry winter in the Sierra Nevada Region, wildfire risks are on the rise in Northern California and the season has just begun. A study released by UC Merced found that fire risk in California will double over the next forty years, and potentially triple in the Sierra foothills by the end of the century largely due to climate change and land development. In response to this increased risk local, regional, and national policies need to be implemented that promote smart land use development and encourage sustainable forest management practices.



California Governor Jerry Brown blames climate change for the early wildfire season and the forecasted severity of the upcoming season.

However, aside from the global issue of climate change – which is absolutely contributing to increased wildfires (more snow falling as precipitation due to warmer winter temperatures equals less snowpack and dryer summer conditions and drought) – poorly planned land use development has increased the threat of wildfires across the U.S. In the Sierra, development has sprawled into forested areas, especially in the foothills, and in periphery counties such as El Dorado, Fresno, Madera, which means increased fire risks to residents.



The debate over best management practices for suppressing future wildfires is somewhat touchy in California. Many interests and issues come into play, especially with the knowledge of how important a role Californian forests play as carbon sinks, dividing groups over management practices such as fuel reduction versus natural burns.

Carbon sinks aside; we know the climate is going to get warmer and that difficult decisions at the regional level need to be made concerning tactics for fire suppression and fuel management. Additionally, at the local level, county general plans need to address the issue of increased wildfire threats in their counties and encourage sustainable land use and development patterns that concentrate growth in urban centers, and prevent irrational growth into at risk areas.

Source: <http://www.globalsiteplans.com/environmental-design/energy-environmental-design/moving-into-the-future-planning-for-wildfires-in-the-sierra/>