


Water agency partners on forest resiliency

Program aims to reduce fire risk in North Yuba Watershed

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Years of unchecked vegetation growth and a changing climate have contributed to forest fires occurring at an alarming rate across California in recent years, causing many to question what else can be done to prevent catastrophic wildfires from claiming more lives and communities in the future.

The Yuba Water Agency, along with eight organizations announced Thursday they would embark on a new program to reduce wildfire risk and increase the resiliency in the North Yuba River watershed, which covers 275,000 acres in the northern Sierra Nevada Mountains.

“Many forests in the North Yuba River watershed are critically unhealthy, overcrowded with small trees and brush,” said Eli Llano, Tahoe National Forest supervisor, in a press release. “Unhealthy forests are at a greater risk of high-severity wildfire due to fire suppression and historic timber harvesting practices, a risk that is exacerbated by a changing climate.”

The groups signed a memorandum of understanding on Thursday signifying their commitment to work together over the next 20 years or so to increase the pace and scale of ecologically-based restoration within the watershed. The efforts will focus around community safety, forest health, and resilience through landscape-scale restoration.

“A hands-off approach to forest management is no longer an option now that our communities, infrastructure and water supply are at significant risk. To make a meaningful impact in this massive effort, it’s going to take all of us who care about the watershed coming together,” said Willie Whittlesey, assistant general manager of the Yuba Water Agency, in the press release.

Organizations partnering on what is being called the North Yuba Forest Partnership include Blue Forest Conservation, Camptonville Community Partnership, National Forest Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Nevada City Rancheria, Sierra County, South Yuba River Citizens League, The United States Forest Service – Tahoe National Forest, and Yuba Water Agency.

Some of the projects will include clearing underbrush, thinning smaller trees, managed burning, reforestation, and meadow restoration.

“It’s important to all of us that we strike that balance between the desperate need to restore the forest’s resilience to wildfire and the need to preserve and protect vulnerable species and cultural artifacts,” said Rachel Hutchinson, director of river science for SYRCL, in a press release.

Over the next few decades, the program will put the highest priority on at-risk communities, emergency response, evacuation access routes, forests of critical ecological importance and areas that have the potential to stop a wildfire from spreading.

For more information about the project, go to www.yubaforests.org.