

# FORESTS WITH A FUTURE

HOME.

HORROR.

## Protect Communities in the Sierra Nevada

### The threat of catastrophic wildfire

In recent decades the number of people living in or near Sierra Nevada forests has dramatically increased – and so has the danger from wildfire. Today, many lives and woodland communities are in urgent jeopardy.

Communities and forests can coexist in harmony – but in the face of the growing fire threat, the terms of that coexistence must change.

In the historic past, Sierra Nevada forests were far less packed with vegetation than they are today. Fires were frequent, low, and slow, a natural part of the forest ecosystem. But fire suppression practices over the last century, often used to protect communities, changed that ecosystem.

Fire suppression produced a dangerous buildup of brush and densely-crowded small-to-medium trees. Overgrown forests allow disease and insects to attack, leaving trees dead, dry, and prone to ignite. This crowding of fuel also helps flames to leap up from the ground to tree tops, and spread in a catastrophic phenomenon known as a “crown fire.” These hot-burning, fast-moving blazes can wipe out local communities, and over the past three decades they have increased dramatically.

Severe wildfires also reduce the soil’s ability to soak up rain. The increased run-off causes soil erosion, mud-slides and flash-flooding – creating havoc for local communities and visitors to the forest.



*Wildfire, out of control, imperils this community's school.*

California had its worst fire season ever in 2003, with losses of 739,000 acres of forest, 3,600 homes, and 22 lives. While those fires occurred mainly in the south, in a different ecosystem than the Sierra Nevada, both areas share a common danger: increased density of “biomass” capable of catastrophic wildfires.

Coexistence of communities and thriving forests can be achieved. We must use better tactics to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires.



# Catastrophic fires destroy people's lives.

## What can be done?

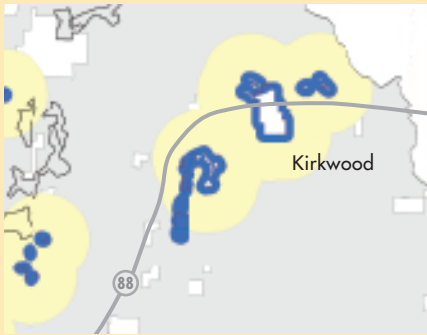
The Forests With A Future Campaign will use the best scientific information available to adapt and apply methods to protect homes and communities in or near fire-threatened wildlands.

An intensified campaign of tree thinning and removal of underbrush will be undertaken in two key areas. Over 50% of the thinning and underbrush removal will be in zones 1½ miles around communities. The campaign will

also carry out thinning at strategically-placed sites in the forest, which will act as “speed bumps” to slow the spread of crown fires. This will benefit local communities as well as old forests and wildlife habitat.

This campaign aims to treat nearly 100% of community defense and threat zones within 20 years. It will use methods of controlled and monitored burning and mechanical removal. Controlled burning generates less smoke, particulate matter and soot than wildfires themselves. Also, unlike random wildfires, prescribed burns can be seasonally timed to reduce pollution.

Local District Rangers will develop tree-thinning and brush removal projects, on a site-specific basis. Forest Service professionals will monitor progress to see how well these efforts protect local communities and also achieve current scientific projections to protect old growth trees and wildlife habitat.



*Thinning trees will reduce fire risk around communities.*

- ¼ mile Defense Zone
- 1 ¼ mile Threat Zone

## Restoring nature's balance

Changing wildfire behavior on a landscape-wide scale won't be quick or easy. Under Forests With A Future, the net growth of forests will still far outpace planned tree removal. But the accumulating threat of decades of uncontrolled growth can be reversed strategically, even while the number of old growth trees doubles in the next fifty years.

Nature seeks balance. A century of fire suppression in the Sierra Nevada has disrupted that balance.

## Please help

We call upon members of the public to participate in this campaign. We ask community groups and civic leaders to stay involved or get involved. We urge you to identify and coordinate resources to achieve fire defense zones around communities, while following Forest Service guidelines to protect wildlife habitat and old growth forests.

Please see further information at

[www.forestsfuture.fs.fed.us](http://www.forestsfuture.fs.fed.us) or  
[www.fs.fed.us/r5/snfpa](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/snfpa)



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