

Crews race to mulch barren King Fire terrain

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Contractors working for the U.S. Forest Service are racing against Mother Nature to spread straw mulch over 1,200 acres of fire-scorched mountainside exposed by the King fire.

As several storms arrive in the next week, forest officials fear a big, wet one will hit. Without the underbrush and plant material that normally cover the forest, massive erosion will wash away roads, fill reservoirs and harm other critical infrastructure.

The September wildfire burned 97,717 acres. While much of the damaged forest survived with the trees' canopy largely intact, an estimated 30 percent of the damage is severe, said Mary Moore, a key member of the team assessing the damage. Of that area, 1,200 acres were identified as key to protect through an aerial drop of mulch on the steep slopes near roads, waterways and other assets.

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