

Opinion: Calif. forests need better care

By Van Butsic, Henry McCann and Jeffrey Mount, San Francisco Chronicle

California's forests are on fire, with tragic consequences for communities around the state. While the firestorm in the Wine Country has made international headlines, many small mountain communities also were aflame or on high alert.

The focus now is on saving lives and protecting property, but when the fires are out, the state will have to face up to a major problem: Our forests are too dense and dry, and, in some areas, dying. We need a new way to manage this vital natural resource.

Nowhere is our challenge greater than in our headwater forests, the watershed for roughly two-thirds of California's surface water supply and 15 percent of its electricity from hydropower plants. Failure to better manage our forests will result in higher future costs to fight wildfires, impaired air and water quality, and increased greenhouse gases due to loss of carbon stored in trees and soils.

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