U.S. Forest Service Says Conditions Ideal For Megafires in California

By AMY QUINTON - CAPITAL PUBLIC RADIO • 23 HOURS AGO

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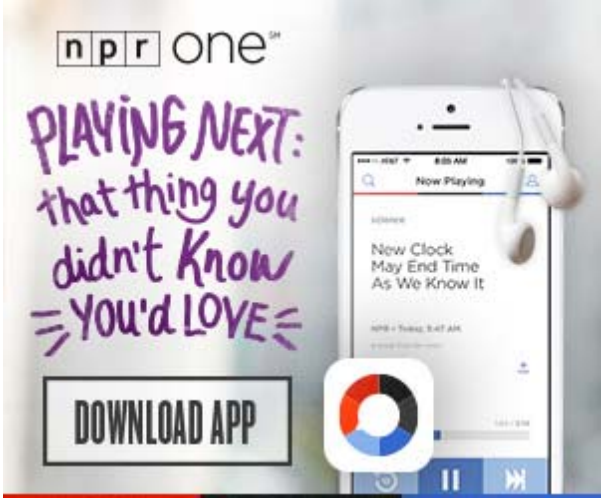

Drought, dead and dying trees, and a lack of snow in California have left national forests in a perfect condition for large and severe wildfires. As Amy Quinton reports from Sacramento, the new mix has the U.S. Forest Service re-examining how it manages fire.

The U.S. Forest Service has historically tried to let lightning-caused fires burn in remote areas as a way to reduce forest density. The hope was to keep forests - particularly in northern California - healthy. Chris Schow with the U.S. Forest Service Fire Aviation and Management Division says that way of managing wildfire probably won't work this year.

> *Schow: "Due to weather conditions well beyond our control, we could see another megafire."*

Those are fires that can burn hundreds of thousands of acres severely. He says the forest service is attacking all fires quickly.

> *Schow: "We're initially attacking all of our fires aggressively trying to keep them small, we're currently at our 98- percent success rate on initial attack, our intent is to keep that going."*

Jim Branham with the Sierra Nevada Conservancy says the practice of fire suppression can make severe wildfires more likely. But he's not surprised at the Forest Service decision given the dry conditions.

> *Branham: "So when you look at all the tools you have to restore these forests we're being more limited at a time where we need to be more proactive."*

The Forest Service says growing numbers of dead and dying trees in the Sierra are also adding fuel and making fire danger worse.

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