

# Healthy Forests Matter

Sierra Nevada forests are the **primary source of most of California's water**, are home to a uniquely rich assortment of plants and animals, and are a premier recreational destination for people around the world. Unfortunately, the health of Sierra forests are in decline, increasing the risk of **catastrophic wildfires** that can result in **serious statewide consequences** as illustrated by the Rim Fire. While periodic fire is part of a healthy ecosystem, the current condition of many of our forests makes beneficial fires less likely and large, intense, destructive fires more likely.

Sierra Nevada watersheds act as natural reservoirs and carbon sinks for California. Because these forests and watersheds are so critical to the State, we need thoughtful management, active collaboration, and continued investment to protect the values of the Region. Through the Sustainable Forest and Community Initiative (SNFCI), the SNC is engaged in activities that support the **restoration and preservation** of our forests to protect and enhance the quality and quantity of water flowing from them, **while ensuring the local community benefit from the efforts.**

SNC continued its SNFCI initiative in FY 2012-13, seeing resulting successful collaboration where a wide range of interests have come together and identified a common ground. The SNC continued to provide funding and staff support to a number of SNFCI efforts around the Region. Work occurring as a result of these efforts includes **forest restoration projects**, activities aimed at locating forest biomass energy facilities in communities (see sidebar), and crucial research and monitoring efforts. The Region has also seen three collaboratives awarded funding under the federal Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, resulting in a 10 year commitment of funding.

While progress is being made, there is an urgent need to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration work in the Sierra Nevada. Not only will this work reduce the risk of large damaging fires, protect California's water supply, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it provides an opportunity to create jobs in economically distressed rural communities.



Photo Credit USFS

## Forest Biomass to Energy

During the past year, the SNC has been active in efforts to create markets and infrastructure for the use of forest biomass, including converting it to electricity. For a variety of reasons, there is currently excess biomass 'fuel' (mostly brush and small diameter trees) built up in the forest. One means to reduce large, catastrophic fire is forest restoration treatments involving removal of biomass. Utilization of biomass is important to provide financial support for forest health projects that reduce fire size and severity. Restoration and the utilization of biomass provide opportunities to contribute positively to local economies. The SNC has been identified in the California 2012 Bioenergy Action Plan as the lead on a number of actions related to the development of community-scale forest biomass energy facilities. The SNC is assisting numerous communities throughout the Sierra that have expressed interest in utilizing forest biomass for energy and other purposes.