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Tim Hearden/Capital Press
A logger operates a hot saw in a private forest near Shingletown, Calif., in late April. Drought is taking a toll on forests in California, as a lack of water makes trees more susceptible to pest pressure and disease.

Insect infestations killing trees in Sierra

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

DAVIS, Calif. — Drought is taking a toll on California forest lands, weakening trees and making them more susceptible to deadly attacks from pests, according to a university study.

U.S. Forest Service aerial monitoring surveys in 2015 showed a large increase in tree mortality in the southern Sierra Nevada, as an estimated 10 million dead trees were spotted in more than 4.1 million acres of public and private land, according to the University of California’s Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

The lack of water is leaving trees without the pitch necessary to prevent beetles from burrowing into the tree through the bark, leading to an infestation that overcomes the tree, explained Susie Kocher, a UC Cooperative Extension advisor.

The best defense is to space trees widely enough to give them more access to resources and thinning the forest to reduce overcrowding, Kocher wrote in a report on the UC’s website.

Sierra Pacific Industries spokesman Mark Pawlicki said the company is encountering stressed trees on its land and agrees that forest thinning is a solution.

“The answer is to remove the dead and dying trees and continue to try to keep the remaining trees healthy by avoiding over-stocking,” Pawlicki said in an email. “And pray for rain!”

While the dry conditions make it harder for companies to receive the go-ahead to initiate logging projects in some instances, widespread bug infestations could further complicate matters for a timber industry that is still one of the mountain region’s leading agricultural industries, generating \$128.4 million in value in 2013, according to a California State University-Chico study.

As forests remain dry, thinning projects become more difficult, timber professionals have said.

“We’re absolutely going to lose some time this summer because of the fire danger,” Larry Strawn, owner of Redding, California-based Blue Ridge Forest Management, said recently.

One of the main culprits killing pines in the Sierra is the western pine beetle, which bore into ponderosa pines, lay eggs which develop into larvae in the inner bark and then complete development in the outer bark, Kocher wrote.

In the Stanislaus National Forest, areas with dead trees have doubled since last year, and more than 5 million trees were killed in the Sierra and Sequoia national forests — up from about 300,000 trees killed in the same area last year, she reported.

The report comes after UC-Merced researchers said in May that increasing projects to thin trees and clear brush from forest floors could boost water yields from mountain forests by as much as 10 percent.

California

Ranchers seek to protect grazing in wildlife plan

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A statewide ranchers’ organization is working to dissuade state officials from seeing grazing as a threat to wildlife.

The California Cattlemen’s Association has been taking part in state conference calls with affected groups as part of its revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan, for which the state is taking public comments through July 2.

Kirk Wilbur, the CCA’s government relations director, is involved in developing “companion plans” dealing with agriculture and forests and rangelands, and is also crafting the organization’s comments on the plan itself, he said.

“It’s kind of an interesting process,” Wilbur said. “They’re all webcast formats, so we all hop on a conference call, and they’ve got ... a very specific protocol they ask us to follow during each of the meetings. It’s really not a

free-flowing participation and pointing out your organization’s point of view.”

The original State Wildlife Action Plan was developed in 2005 to comply with a federal requirement to submit wildlife management strategies to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to obtain funding for wildlife conservation.

State officials say the updated plan will analyze threats and stresses to habitat by region, consider potential climate change impacts and recommend conservation actions.

An early outline of the plan drew fire from the CCA and California Farm Bureau Federation, which expressed concerns about language that lists “livestock farming and ranching” as a potential threat to habitat in some regions. The groups fear the language could lead to more restrictions on grazing.

Officials from the state Department of Fish and Wildlife told the Capital Press when they started updating the plan in 2013 that



Tim Hearden/Capital Press
Kirk Wilbur (right) of the California Cattlemen's Association talks with Ben Letton of the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board before a meeting in Redding, Calif., in January. Wilbur has been participating in state conference calls on a proposed wildlife management plan.

they understand that grazing managed correctly can benefit wildlife.

Farm groups want the new plan, which will be finalized later this year, to recognize that science has shown in recent years that proper grazing activities are beneficial. About 40 million acres are grazed in California, nearly 40 percent of the state’s total land mass, and most of it is

Online
State Wildlife Action Plan:
<https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/SWAP/Interim-Products>

structured in a rigid enough manner that it’s difficult to really influence the plan too much with your constituency’s concerns and interests,” he said, adding that too many groups may be involved to allow a free-flowing discussion.

The CFBF is participating in the talks for a companion plan on agriculture. Officials from the state’s Farm Bureau did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

The SWAP process is separate from the Grazing Regulatory Action Project, which the State Water Resources Control Board began working on earlier this year. Water board officials say the project would enhance the environmental benefits from grazing while addressing its impacts on water quality, but ranchers argue such a regulation is unnecessary.

California tries to save salmon in Wine Country creeks

By **ELLEN KNICKMEYER**
Associated Press

SONOMA, Calif. (AP) — California is taking desperate steps to save the last endangered salmon in Wine Country creeks that are going dry because of over-pumping and the drought, officials said Thursday.

Water has run so low in the four tributaries of the Russian River in Sonoma County that state workers have been dispatched with nets and buckets to rescue the last surviving coho salmon.

Threatened steelhead trout are also being pulled from drying stretches of the waterways.

In addition, the state Water Resources Control Board next

week will consider ordering world-class wineries and thousands of other landowners along those creeks to stop all watering of lawns and to start monitoring how much water they are using.

“Fish rescue is an emergency-room action. It’s not a solution,” said Andrew Hughan, spokesman for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. “The solution is water in the creek.”

The state is not asking the wineries to cut back on watering of gravevines. The state says pumping from wells near the creeks is helping draw down the levels in the waterways.

Landowners and vineyard managers are trading blame for draining the streams.

“It’s more than just” drought, said Jim Doerksen, a ranch owner along Mark West Creek, one of the four tributaries. “Vineyard wells are pretty substantial wells.”

Sonoma County’s billion-dollar wine industry contends it’s cutting water use as much as it can.

“Cohos are in a pretty dire situation here in these watersheds,” said Doug McIlroy of the Sonoma County Winegrape Commission. “A lot of us are aware of that and a lot of us are doing everything we can to help on that.”

California is caught in its driest four-year period on record. Gov. Jerry Brown has ordered 25 percent mandatory conservation starting this month in cities

and towns. Many agricultural areas, mostly in Central and Southern California, also have been told to cut water use.

The measures under consideration in Wine Country would apply to 13,000 property owners along the Russian River tributaries running through Sonoma and Napa counties.

The creeks once supported a thriving commercial catch that took thousands of coho salmon a year. Today, local populations of coho survive only through government breeding programs.

The water board will consider ordering wineries and homeowners to use only recycled water on lawns and other landscaping.

Water board members also

will decide whether to require everyone along the creeks to start measuring how much water they are drawing from the creeks and from wells along the streams.

The groundwater tracking requirement would be rare in California, which has long abided by Gold Rush-era laws allowing landowners to pump groundwater unregulated and at will. Legislation passed in 2014 will gradually phase in groundwater regulation.

McIlroy noted that many vineyards along the creeks have granted access to the wildlife officials who are trying to move salmon to areas of the streams that still have more water.



Courtesy of Assemblyman Brian Dahle
California Assemblyman Brian Dahle addresses the media at a recent water rally at the state Capitol in Sacramento. Dahle’s bill to give preference to California-grown lumber in state contracts is being challenged by Canadian trade officials.

Bill to set preference for wood products irks Canada

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A noncontroversial bill in the Legislature encouraging state contractors to buy local lumber has become the source of a budding international trade dispute.

The bill by Assemblyman Brian Dahle, R-Bieber, would require that contractors building state road signs, guard rails and other projects procure their wood from California sources when prices and quality are equal.

The legislation appeared headed for easy passage after receiving unanimous approvals from two Assembly committees and the full lower chamber, but Dahle temporarily pulled the bill from Senate consideration after lawmakers received a complaint from the Canadian consulate.

The bill “sends the wrong message to businesses and investors” considering that Canada purchases 10 percent of California’s foreign-bound goods, Cassie Doyle, the Canadian consul general in San Francisco, told the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee in a June 8 letter.

“Canada is a proud trading nation that believes in open and reciprocal trade,” she wrote. “While we fully understand that governments need to support industries in their

jurisdiction, measures aimed at limiting the market access of top trading partners often results in more harm than good to workers and businesses on both sides of the border.”

Doyle’s letter notes that California and Canada are parties to the World Trade Organization’s Government Procurement Agreement, which aims to provide trading partners with greater access to procurement markets.

Canada’s sustainable forest management practices are internationally recognized and the nation’s trade in goods with California totals \$46.1 billion annually, supporting more than 1 million California jobs, Justin Currie, the consulate’s foreign policy and diplomacy officer, told the Capital Press in an email.

The dispute comes as Canada is riding high after victories in the WTO over the U.S.’ mandatory meat-labeling law. The U.S. House of Representatives has voted to repeal the law as Canada and Mexico are preparing to seek the WTO’s approval to initiate retaliatory tariffs on U.S. goods, potentially including lumber.

Dahle said he wanted to hold his bill back for several weeks to try to smooth things over with the Canadians, but he may move forward with the legislation with or without their support.

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