

CSAS is working with Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions

The Rim Fire started on August 17, 2013 and was contained on October 24, 2013 after consuming 257,314 acres in Tuolumne and Mariposa counties. This was the third largest wildfire in California's history and the biggest wildfire on record in the Sierra Nevada. Significant damage was done to habitat, wildlife, livestock, timber, and rangeland resources.

The Central Sierra Audubon Society (CSAS) has joined with a diverse coalition of local stakeholders to form an independent group called the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions (YSS) collaborative to take action and work together to conserve the area's environmental resources. The mission "is to restore and maintain healthy forests and watersheds, fire-safe communities, and sustainable local economies using a science-based approach." The group is comprised of environmental groups, forest-products companies, ranchers, community businesses, and county, state and federal agencies.

Initial discussions centered on finding common ground in areas such as how much salvage logging is appropriate, how much of the forest should be left untouched and how much should be re-planted. Much of the long term restoration discussion will continue but it was agreed, despite differences in opinion on some points, that some burned areas are appropriate for immediate salvage of dead trees. This will help prevent another fire with the severity to destroy the re-growing forest, reduce the demand for logging live trees elsewhere, and provide local jobs. A letter was written from YSS to local elected representatives and the Forest Service that "the fuel reduction benefit of removing salvage wood from the Rim Fire as rapidly as possible should override any potential for a legal delay."

Over the next months, CSAS and others independently reviewed the Forest Service plans and provided comments. The CSAS Board supported protection for the spotted owls and great gray owls, careful protection of water resources, and removing dead trees and those not expected to survive for safety reasons and for fuel reduction. The three CSAS letters may be viewed below.

On August 27th, 2016 the Forest Service released its final EIS for the Rim Fire and the forest supervisor's proposed [Report Of Decision](#) was posted the next day. The Record of Decision (08-28-2014) document lays out the framework for the decision which takes the middle ground recommended by YSS and CSAS. The forest supervisor proposed a decision which includes salvage logging to ensure safety and reduce the risk of another extreme fire and has no habitat disturbing actions on about 83% of the Rim Fire area. She noted trade-offs she had to consider involving the habitat needs of species dependent on old forest habitats like the California Spotted Owl, Northern Goshawk and Fisher and those dependent on burned forest habitats like the Black-Backed Woodpecker. The Decision retains 10-20 tons of dead wood/acre to benefit spotted owls, great gray owls and northern goshawks, striking a balance between critical fuel reduction and immediate habitat needs of some species.

I constantly hear people voice concerns about the inability of politicians to work together to implement sustainable strategies to problems facing all of us which can balance economic viability, diverse interests, and environmental stewardship. I believe collaborative efforts like we are taking with YSS stand the greatest chance of delivering these visions while restoring the forest.

—Walt Kruse, Vice President and Conservation Chair