Data Submitted (UTC 11): 7/21/2023 12:57:46 PM
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Comments: Hazard tree removal can be abused. After the Butte Fire, along Electra Road in Amador County, PG&E hired a Texas contractor to remove damaged trees. One medium-sized tree removed near Vaux (BOX) beach was a California coffee tree. (I had misidentified it, and I had sent a sample to the herbarium at UC-Davis for the correct ID). The tree had been uprooted by a backhoe removing fire debris and burnt hazards in order to dump the piles over the edge into the river's gorge.
The same company left a hazard tree at the cattle grate where the xylem of the tree was compromised by interior burning.
Generally, it is conceded that California's forests are overstocked with trees - a man-made condition from a 100 years of fire suppression. Hazard tree removal is not a solution to the lack of a regular fire cycle and natural fire regime.
I'm touting these two cons to hazard tree removal, but hazard tree removal, even sometimes limbs of healthy trees, is necessary for safety in a campground. In Yosemite NP, campsites are occupied during winter snows, and removals have to be visionary and precise.
I will cite one example as a reminder. The famous McCormick's Creek State Park in Indiana was hit by a tornado in 2022, wiping out the campground and killing a camping couple. Climate change adds to the vision that is needed in hazard tree removals.
****Hazard tree removals are not a genuine substitute for prescribed fire in over-stocked forestland where tree density that promotes tree mortality is an over-arching cause.
**** Chief Randy Moore made water management a priority in our national forests. Dr Malcolm North, UC-Davis, says generally of trees in the state: given all the water and nutrients it wants, an acre of forest land reaches a maximum density, a cap on the carrying capacity of trees. California, he insists, is at 70% of the peak density now, because of a 100 years of fire suppression, and the state would be at 35% thereabouts had a normal fire regime abounded.
Trees are bio-pumps that transpire water, dry soils and shorten the life of seasonal streams. McLaughlin, Kaplan and Cohen, writing in the JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN WATER RESOUCES ASSOCIATION, calculate a 64% increase in water yield for the coastal southeast U.S. if longleaf pine are reintroduced with prescribed fire. I think the main motive behind hazard tree removals is to reduce legal exposures from damages rather than true forest management of the resources.
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