

# Watershed Management from the Sierra to the Delta



Jim Branham, Executive Officer  
Sierra Nevada Conservancy

# SNC's Role

- Mission to improve environmental, economic and social well-being of Region and State.
- Proposition 84 – Over \$50 million in grants to improve watershed health.
- Efforts to convene, facilitate and assist a wide range of stakeholders – forestry, recreation, range, bioenergy, abandoned mine lands, etc.



# It's The Water

The overwhelming majority of tributaries that feed the Delta originate in the Sierra Nevada Region.

The Sacramento, San Joaquín, Mokelumne, Cosumnes and Calaveras Rivers all flow into the Delta.





# California's Primary Watershed

The Sierra Nevada provides:

- **More than 60%** of the State's developed water supply
- All or part of the drinking water for 23 million people, major source for agriculture
- Urban water source, e.g.
  - San Francisco → 85% from Tuolumne watershed
  - East Bay → 90% from Mokelumne Watershed





# A Changing Climate

**For the Sierra, The Future  
May Look Much Different  
Than the Past...**

➤ Higher Temperatures in the Sierra will result in:

- More precipitation as rain, less as snow
- Longer, more intense fire seasons





# Cause for Concern

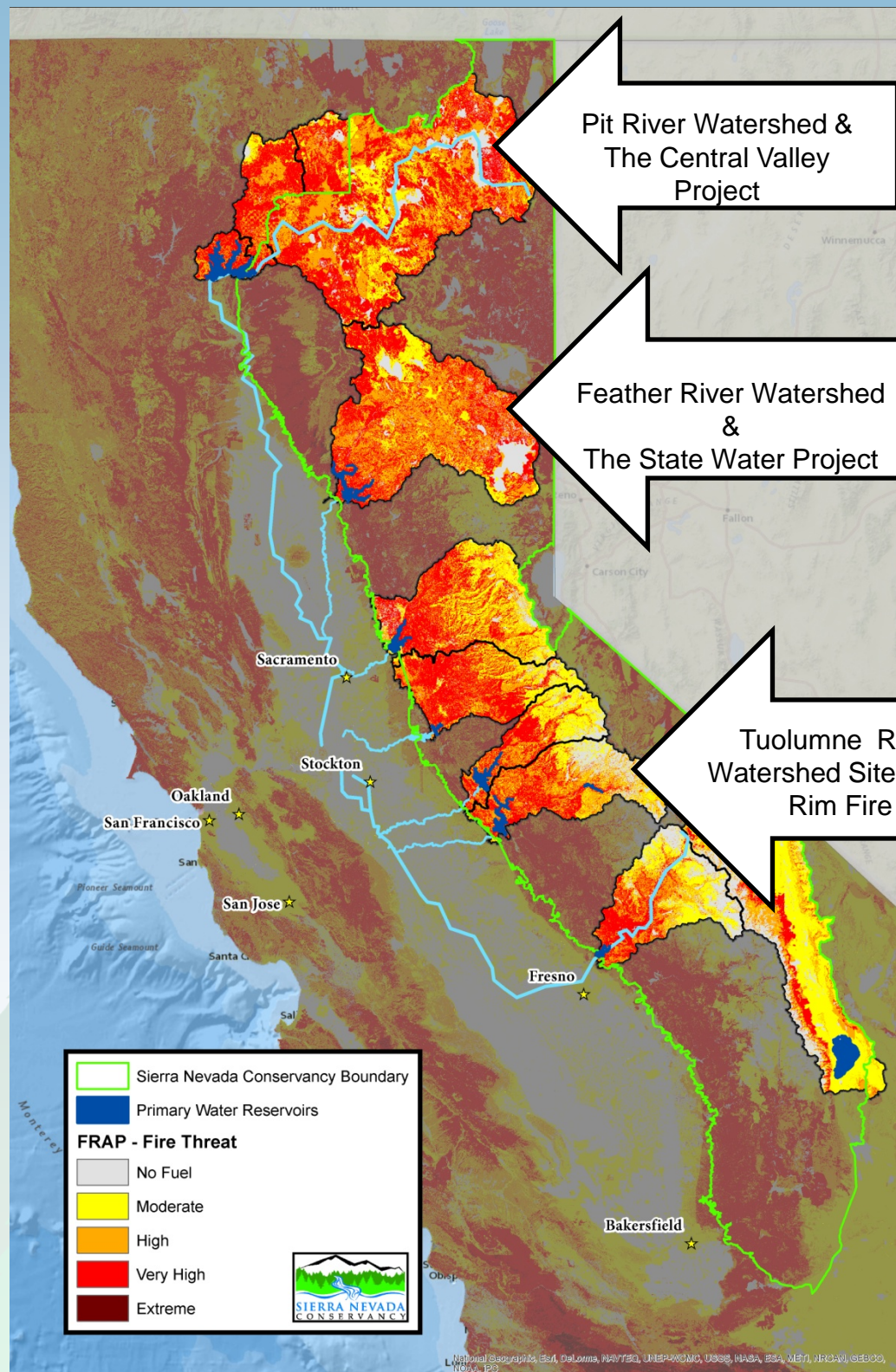


We can expect:

- More mega-fires like the Rim Fire, the largest in the recorded history of the Sierra Nevada.
- Changes in timing of flows presents challenges for operations.
- Massive amounts of sediment will result, reducing important storage capacity.



# Conditions in Much of the Sierra Are Worse Than the Rim Fire Area



Key Sierra watersheds have more acreage in the high/very high fire threat category than the Rim Fire area:

- Pit River Watershed and the federal Central Valley Project: 80% high/very high
- Feather River Watershed and the CA State Water Project: 76% high/very high
- Tuolumne River Watershed and the site of the Rim Fire: 59% high/very high



# Reduced Storage Capacity Will Result

The lost storage capacity that exists due to sedimentation will continue to increase.

A USGS modeling exercise found the following:

- Over 120 reservoirs in CA have capacities reduced to less than 25% of original and almost 190 reservoirs with less than 50% of original capacity



Rollins Reservoir near Colfax, CA



# Mercury from the Sierra is the largest source for the Delta and Bay.



We can expect:

➤ Legacy mining impacts, including toxic substances like mercury, to continue to impact water quality in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and the San Francisco Bay.



# Key SNC Objectives

- Restore watershed health through restoration of forests, meadows, reservoirs and riparian areas
- Reduce the risk and consequence of large damaging fires
- Improve water quality by remediating legacy mining issues at the source
- Protect critical parts of the landscape from conversion to other uses





# Joint Resolution

## Commitment to Work Together



SACRAMENTO - SAN JOAQUIN

**DELTA CONSERVANCY**

*A California State Agency*

### “SIERRA TO THE SEA”

**RESOLVED**, The two organizations will work together to explore and better understand the links between our two regions; and be it further,

**RESOLVED**, The two organizations will work together to educate others about the interconnection between our Regions, consistent with statutory requirements; and be it further,

**RESOLVED**, The two organizations will identify and jointly implement, as appropriate, projects of value and benefit to both regions; and be it further;

**RESOLVED**, The two organizations will call on policy and funding decision-makers to recognize the interconnection of our Regions when making decisions regarding California’s water future.