

SHORT TERM CHANGES IN AVIAN COMMUNITY COMPOSITION WITHIN THE SIERRA NEVADA'S MASSIVE RIM FIRE

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The Rim Fire ignited August 2013 in a remote area of the Stanislaus National Forest ultimately burning 62,536 hectares of National Forest System lands. The largest recorded fire in the Sierra Nevada, the area now harbors snag forest and early successional habitat that is important to many bird species and rare across the Sierra landscape. During May-June 2014, we established 281 point count locations within conifer forest that burned predominantly at moderate to high severity in the Rim Fire. We compared avian abundances in the Rim Fire to 204 point count locations in adjacent central Sierra Nevada green forest. Woodpeckers, aerial flycatchers and seed-eaters, such as Hairy Woodpecker, Western Wood-Pewee and Lazuli Bunting had much greater abundance in the Rim Fire compared to nearby green forest. Birds that primarily use the canopy and understory, including Cassin's Vireo, Dusky Flycatcher and Nashville Warbler had far lower abundance in the Rim Fire. Black-backed Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Western Bluebird and Lawrence's Goldfinch inhabited the Rim Fire but were absent or nearly absent from adjacent green forest. Results from this first year indicate a rich habitat for early-successional birds that will sustain these rarer species on the Sierra landscape for years to come.