

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

Annual Report - 2009

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is a 14-year old community-based collaborative that has been working to restore the health of area forest ecosystems and protect our communities from the threat of high-severity wildfire. Specifically, the Partnership seeks to accomplish the following:

- Restore natural ecosystem composition, structure and function in ponderosa pine forests.
- Manage forest fuels to reduce the probability of high-severity fire and to protect our communities.
- Research, test, develop, and demonstrate key ecological, economic, and social dimensions of forest restoration and community protection.



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Our efforts in calendar year 2009 continued work in five major areas: project design and implementation, development of economic alternatives for use of the small diameter trees and woody biomass removed from our forests, evaluating the effectiveness of our actions, educating the public and engaging them in what we do, and managing and refining the structure we have in place to accomplish our work.

Project design and implementation has increased due to GFFP involvement in the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI). Our initial efforts - to start on the west and southwest sides of town, where fires that might start in existing thick forest fuels would be pushed by prevailing winds right into Flagstaff, and develop collaborative projects that would encircle the community in a protective zone of treated land – has been completed. We continue to track progress on implementation of treatments, with over 70,000 acres of Forest Service land scheduled for treatment – 49,750 of mechanical thinning and 20,975 burn only. To date, approximately 39,400 acres have been treated (by the USFS and all others) within the GFFP boundary. A major focus this year has been on design and completion of the “partner mark” sites within the Mountaineer Project area. This involves writing prescriptions and then marking sites with the Partnership’s “vision” of an open forest structure with groups and clumps of uneven-aged trees. Other significant activities included: continuing use of the City Well Field site as a demonstration area; continued management of our fuel reduction thinning projects on private land within the CWPP area; and our recent collaboration with the Flagstaff Fire Department on the City’s Airport project.

Public information and involvement requires constant effort as newcomers and visitors arrive or visit our area. We continue to promote, track and facilitate implementation of the *Community Wildfire Protection Plan*, especially as it relates to coordination the recently approved *Statewide Strategy for Restoring Arizona’s Forests*. The Partnership continues to receive State Fire Assistance program grants to provide cost-share assistance to a portion of the cost of treating private lands within the Flagstaff wildland/urban interface. To date, almost \$350,000 has been distributed to more than 100 property owners to treat 900 acres of Our targeted program to treat strategic acres through Flagstaff Department and the Highlands Fire District resulted in Little America Hotel completing treatment of 158 additional high priority (248 total). A Western Bark Beetle Initiative grant for \$147,000

has been approved for addressing forest health on additional private lands through 2010. An information kiosk at the Flagstaff Arboretum focused on forest health and Fire Wise issues was opened in the spring. To further public information we partnered with the Ecological Restoration Institute and Flagstaff Fire Department in providing two field trips to the public that visited on-going and planned forest restoration and wildfire protection projects occurring around the City of Flagstaff. Additional public information on forest health and Fire Wise information was provided during the 2009 Flagstaff Festival of Science in the Park, by members of our Board.

Utilization and economic development opportunities continue to be actively pursued. To reduce treatment costs to the federal government for thinning forests to reduce fuel loads, we have been working with Coconino County Sustainable



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Economic Development Initiative (SEDI), SW Sustainable Forest Partnership, Northern Arizona Wood Products Association, and others to attract businesses that use the woody biomass by-products from our forest restoration projects, and also to secure long-term and large-scale commitments of wood fiber from the US Forest Service. While businesses have not yet been created and Ash Fork sawmill of Southwest Forest Products has closed, we have made great progress on landscape-scale and long-term restoration initiatives. We continue to explore various bio-energy options for utilization of woody forest biomass as a feedstock, including NAU with CRER (Community Renewable Energy Resources) of Northern Arizona & New Mexico. We also participated and presented at the Southwest Renewable Energy Conference held at NAU.



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Monitoring and research allows us to understand how our actions affect ecosystems and communities and then guides the implementation of adaptive management that ultimately promotes economic, social and ecological sustainability. Since forest restoration is a relatively new science, we have not been able to predict with absolute accuracy the levels of fire protection that are being provided to our community, neighborhoods and infrastructure. Our goal is to implement treatments that reflect a diverse, heterogeneous forest structure of tree clumps and groups interspersed with grassy openings, verses homogenous stands of evenly spaced and similarly sized trees with a few embedded openings. In attempting to achieve these conditions, only monitoring will confirm if that has been achieved. Major effort was directed towards post-treatment monitoring of conditions at the City Well Field site and the resulting determination of the effects of these treatments. We also completed pre-treatment monitoring of all three Mountaineer “partner mark” sites in conjunction with NAU’s School of Forestry and are in the process of completing fire modeling to determine pre-treatment fire conditions. Post treatment data will also be collected from these sites after thinning and fire modeling will compare pre- to post-treatment to determine differences in predicted fire behavior. In addition, a qualitative assessment report of the Mountaineer II Partner Mark was completed to improve project design

(prescriptions) and the actual marking of a site. Pre-treatment monitoring data has been collected on the Airport Project site (in conjunction with the School) and a special wildlife study is also being conducted there (in conjunction with AZGF) to assess effects of these treatments on Abert’s squirrels and other key wildlife. A study was designed and initiated to evaluate potential health responses to smoke and identify methods to improve project implementation and reduce smoke emissions. Our Lesson’s Learned Report that identifies key achievements and how we can improve into the future will soon be finalized and shared with a wide array of stakeholders. Lastly, we are keenly aware of the data collected in the 2009 City of Flagstaff Citizen Survey regarding public support for prescribed fire, utilization of small diameter trees, and increasing taxes to support this utilization and will build on these results as well as posting the results on our website.

Management and administration activity is essential for any collaborative organization addressing complex issues. The Partnership has adapted to all-volunteer status very well. We have targeted our limited funding to specific project areas through contract work. Partners have supported action teams to guide activities and specific programs, and then organizations or individuals with expertise specific to each task have been contracted to accomplish on-the-ground actions. Board members have stepped up to complete tasks and coordinate with project contractors. The model we initiated in early 2008 appears to be working well and, as a result, our administrative expenses have been limited to general liability and Directors’ & Officers’ insurance, accounting and bookkeeping services, copying, printing and mailing, web maintenance, and miscellaneous minor charges.

It was back in late 1996 that the founders of the Partnership got together for the first time to figure out how the community could address the forest health crisis and protect Flagstaff from threats presented by wildfires burning in the area. A lot has been accomplished in 2009, but we look forward to the future as we continue to meet the needs of Flagstaff and surrounding communities with our volunteer effort. In 2010 we expect to: see long-term and large scale commitments of wood by the Forest Service (based on the *Analysis of Small Diameter Wood Supply in Northern Arizona* report) which will facilitate the establishment of new sustainable industries; continue and accelerate treatment of approved projects; treat additional private lands; collaborate with many new organizations to implement new projects and activities that are consistent with and coordinated under with the *Statewide Strategy to Restore Arizona’s Forests* and the 4FRI effort.

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