

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is a community-based collaborative that has been working since it was formed almost ten years ago on restoring the health of area forest ecosystems and protecting our communities from the threat of catastrophic 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 catastrophic fire and to protect our communities.
- Research, test, develop, and demonstrate key ecological, economic, and social dimensions of forest restoration and community protection.

Our efforts in 2005 included many areas of activity, including ongoing programs and new initiatives. We 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 what we have accomplished to date with 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 requires significant time and resources every year. Monthly Partnership Advisory Board (PAB) meetings provide a forum for discussion of issues within our community for addressing the problems confronting us on both public and private land. On the public side, we completed collaborative planning with the Coconino National Forest on the Mountaineer Project and currently we are planning for the Eastside Project. When Eastside is completed later this year, we will begin on our final “spoke in the wheel” of projects – Jack Smith/Schultz – which will finish planning for the 100,000+ acres of Forest Service land within our boundary. Thus, we will have completed the original conceptual design of our Partnership – 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 work around the community to encircle it in a protective zone of treated land. We continued to track implementation of treatments within the Fort Valley, Kachina and Woody Ridge projects. To date, planning is completed or underway for 104,010 acres (with 42,150 acres of Forest Service land scheduled to be treated) and more than 5,050 acres have been treated by mechanical thinning. Our private land treatment programs are addressed below.

Public information and involvement requires constant effort as newcomers and visitors arrive or visit our area. Our most significant accomplishment by far last year was final approval of the “*Community Wildfire Protection Plan for Flagstaff and Surrounding Communities in the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests of Coconino County, Arizona*” (CWPP). Developed in conjunction with the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council, this plan established a new Wildland/Urban Interface (W/UI) zone. GFFP staff participates with numerous partners in the CWPP Review Team, which facilitates and tracks implementation. In addition to fuel reduction treatments on public land, the Partnership secured funding from the UA Forest Health Program in 2005 to continue our State Fire Assistance initiated program to provide cost-share assistance to cover one half of the cost of treating private lands within the Flagstaff W/UI. To date, over \$42,700.00 has been distributed to property owners to treat 142.2 acres of forest. This year we are targeting specific funding allocations for the Highlands, Summit and Sedona Fire Districts to treat strategic areas. From a previous State Fire Assistance Education grant, the Partnership provided financial assistance to the NAU Centennial Forest Junior Forester Academy and to Willow Bend Environmental Education Center for their Backyard Forest Habitat Education Project. The monthly Community Forest Forum also continues our public outreach efforts on prescribed burning, smoke management, and other topics related to forest restoration.

Utilization and economic development opportunities have been actively pursued. Since the loss of regional saw mills in the nineties that provided a commercial use for harvested timber, the cost to the federal government for thinning forests to reduce fuel loads climbed to from \$350 to sometimes \$1,000 per acre. To reduce treatment costs, we have been working with several Partners, especially the Greater Flagstaff Economic Council, to attract



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businesses that produce value added products from our vast forest resources. This past year we provided extensive coordination for the proposed Camp Navajo industrial park as a site for development of a “wood products campus”. We also have lead an effort to develop a biomass energy plant at NAU to provide combined electricity, syngas and heat for campus use, as well as a cutting-edge renewable energy demonstration and education facility. This bioenergy plant would be especially important as one possible solution to utilization of woody forest biomass left over from fuel reduction treatments, which are currently being piled in the forest and burned creating smoke and patches of sterilized forest soil subject to invasion by exotic species. When these new commercial ventures come online and begin paying for the removal of forest material, our capacity to make progress in the treatment of forest ecosystems and protect communities from wildfire will be greatly accelerated because costs to the US Treasury will go down and income will be generated.

Monitoring and research allows us to understand how what we have done affects our ecosystems and communities. Since forest restoration is such a 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. GFFP recently secured a grant from the National Forest Foundation to carefully monitor various fuel reduction treatments that have been implemented on the south and west sides of town, and evaluate how effective they have been for modifying fire behavior at both the project scale and cumulatively over a larger landscape. Data generated by this monitoring program will also be used to more accurately predict the optimum mix of treatments to achieve specified levels of restoration and protection, and at what cost. This project is tied closely to our CWPP. We also continue to track extensive research efforts and analyze data generated by the Ecological Restoration Institute, USFS Rocky Mountain Research Station, The Nature Conservancy, and other entities.

Management and administration activity is essential to any organization addressing complex issues. The Partnership took a great step forward in 2005 when the Board of Directors undertook creation of our first long-term strategic plan. A Strategic Planning Team solicited extensive outside participation beyond the many Partners that were involved and formulated a plan covering the period from 2006-2010. The resulting document not only presents the traditional mission, vision, core values, goals, objectives and actions, it goes one step further and articulates five “Highest Priority and Immediate Goals”, which represent an institutional must-do list fundamental to the future of the Partnership. The PAB has already created working teams to address these five priorities and report back on a monthly basis. Financial stability continues to be a priority as we fundraise for operations and unrestricted grants to support program area grants. These continue to become harder and harder to secure. We operated on reduced staffing for almost half the year when the Program Assistant took an outreach position with the County, however, a new person, Jo Starr, started in January 2006.

Overall, 2005 was a pivotal year for GFFP. Much was accomplished: a Strategic Plan developed to guide our future, implementation of the CWPP began, progress was made on business development for small diameter timber and woody biomass utilization, the public was engaged through learning and treatment of private lands, and community protection received a big boost from implementation of the collaboratively designed fuel reduction thinning on public land. This report covers just some of what we worked on in 2005. We look forward to 2006 when final project planning with the Coconino National Forest is complete, new businesses use forest resources removed during fuel reduction treatments to make value-added products and bioenergy, the public knows why we are doing the things that they see happening around them and support our efforts, and above all, more forests are restored and a higher level of protection from wildfire is provided for our communities.

