

# **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 2006 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 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 a significant amount of time and resources each year. On the public side, we completed collaborative planning with the Coconino National Forest on the *Eastside Fuel Reduction and Forest Health Project* and initiated planning for the Jack Smith/Schultz Project. When Jack Smith/Schultz is completed later this year, we will have finished planning and design for all of the 100,000+ acres of Forest Service land within the GFFP boundary. Thus, 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 develop collaborative projects that would encircle it in a protective zone of treated land – will have been completed. We also tracked progress on implementation of treatments within all project areas. To date, planning is completed or underway for 113,850 acres (with 60,500 acres of Forest Service land scheduled to be treated) and more than 7,000 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. We continue to promote, track and facilitate implementation of the *Community Wildfire Protection Plan*. GFFP and Flagstaff Fire Department staff coordinate with numerous partners in the CWPP Review Team. In addition to fuel reduction treatments on public land, the Partnership continued implementation of the combined UA Forest Health/State Fire Assistance program to provide cost-share assistance to cover one half of the cost of treating private lands within the Flagstaff wildland/urban interface. To date, over \$100,000.00 has been distributed to property owners to treat more than 385 acres of forest. Another \$30,000 is encumbered to treat another 100 acres through focused efforts of the Flagstaff, Highlands, Summit and Fort Valley Fire Districts to treat strategic areas. And approximately \$50,000 remains for treating private lands through 2008. Our monthly Community Forest Forum held at City Hall and regular web site updates continue our public outreach efforts on prescribed burning, fuel reduction projects, 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 1990's 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 businesses that produce value added products from our vast forest resources. The proposed Camp Navajo *Volunteer Mountain Industrial Park* became a reality and planning continues for potential development of a wood products campus and bioenergy plant. We did not receive the DOE/USDA grant to develop a biomass energy plant at NAU, but continue to explore bioenergy options for utilization of woody forest biomass left over from fuel reduction treatments. A very positive development has been the emergence of Arizona Forest Restoration Products from an older company we were working with, Arizona Lumber Products. They are proposing



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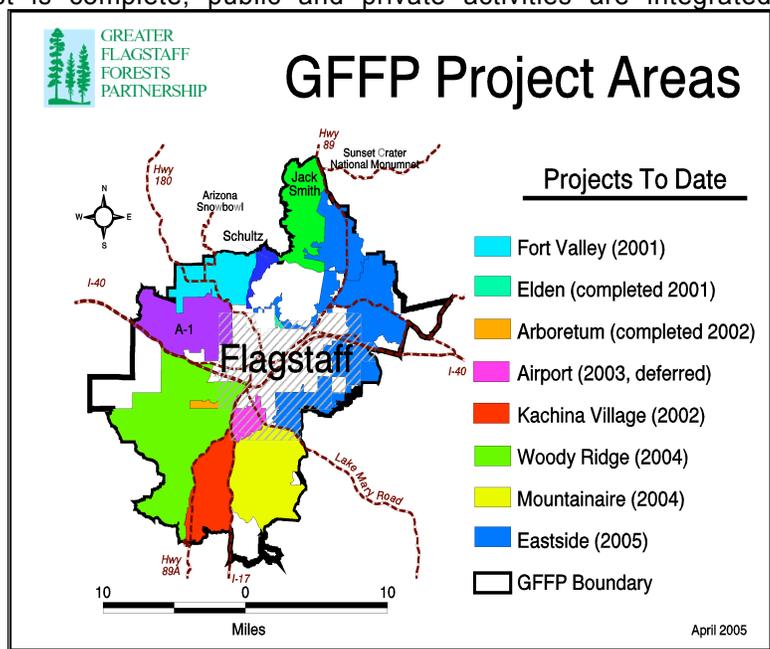
construction of an oriented strand board plant in northern Arizona that would consume large volumes of small diameter timber (5" to 14" trees) to make OSB, and also woody biomass to generate electricity in an on-site 24 MW bioenergy plant. When any new commercial venture comes online and begin paying 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 our actions affect 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. We completed the National Forest Foundation funded monitoring project to evaluate how effective various treatments have been for modifying fire behavior. Data generated by this monitoring program is being used to more accurately predict the optimum mix of treatments to achieve specified levels of restoration and protection, and we are applying the monitoring protocol in other treatment scenarios, like the "partner mark" project. This is another adaptive management effort to use information we have learned during earlier fuel reduction treatments to design a prescription that achieves desired fire behavior modification objectives, but also restores a post-treatment forest structure with much higher ecological and aesthetic values. Across several partner mark sites we are implementing treatments that reflect a more diverse/heterogenous forest structure of tree clumps and groups interspersed with extensive grassy openings instead of homogenous stands of evenly spaced and similarly sized trees with a few embedded openings.

**Management and administration** activity is essential to any organization addressing complex issues. The Partnership took a great step forward in 2006 when the Board of Directors approved our first long-term strategic plan. Action Teams worked on the priority goals, which represent an institutional must-do list fundamental to the future of the Partnership. Financial stability continues to be a challenge as we fundraise for operations and unrestricted grants to supplement our program area restricted grants. These continue to become harder and harder to secure. Jo Starr, our new Program Assistant who started in January 2006, secured a large donation of GIS software and training (valued at \$20,900) from ESRI (Environmental Systems Research Institute) and, with this new capacity, has taken over updating of the Flagstaff area treatment map from Flagstaff Fire Department's Fuel Management program.

The GFFP celebrated its 10 year anniversary late in 2006 – in late 1996 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 the many wildfires burning in the area. The result was the Grand Canyon Forests Foundation, which became GFFP in 2003. A lot was accomplished in 2006, but we look forward to 2007 when final project planning with the Coconino National Forest is complete, public and private activities are integrated more cohesively under the Community Wildfire Protection Plan, implementation of restoration treatments increases as new business use small diameter timber and woody biomass removed during thinning, the public knows what is going on and support our efforts, and above all, more forests are restored and a higher level of protection from wildfire is provided for our communities and infrastructure.

Please visit our web site at [www.gffp.org](http://www.gffp.org) for updates of current programs, archives of past work, or just to learn more about this important, active and effective community partnership.



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