

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

Annual Report - 2007

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is a 10-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 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 calendar year 2007 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 last project area within our 180,000 acre boundary – the *Jack Smith/Schultz Project*. Objections were filed on the JS/S Project EA and it is currently undergoing revision by the USFS. We are excited that planning for the original design of this 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 the community in a protective zone of treated land – has been completed. We also tracked progress on implementation of treatments within all of our eight project areas. To date, planning is completed on 115,850 acres, with 70,725 acres of Forest Service land scheduled for treatment – 49,750 of mechanical thinning and 20,975 burn only. More than 11,000 acres have already been treated by mechanical thinning. Other significant activities included: close collaboration with FFD on design and cutting of the City Well Field site; design and completion of a Partner restoration prescription and “mark” on a section of the Mountaineer project area; and management of a fuel reduction thinning project around the communication tower site up on Devils Head.

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 with the recently approved *Statewide Strategy for Restoring Arizona’s Forests*. 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 \$150,000.00 has been distributed to property owners to treat more than 450 acres of forest. Our targeted program to treat strategic acres through FFD and the Highlands, Summit and Fort Valley Fire Districts resulted in Little America Hotel treating 150 high priority acres, and also involved crews from CREC (Coconino Rural Environment Corps). Another SFA grant for \$95,000 has been approved for treating additional private lands through 2009. In addition, plans are underway for the Fire Wise kiosk at the Arboretum with another recently received SFA public education grant.

Utilization and economic development opportunities continue to be 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 worked with the Greater Flagstaff Economic Council, to attract businesses that produce value added products from our vast forest resources and secure long-term and large-scale commitments of wood fiber from the US Forest Service. The Camp Navajo *Volunteer Mountain Industrial Park* has suffered several delays, but planning continues for potential development of a wood products campus and bioenergy plant. We continue to explore various bioenergy options for utilization of woody forest biomass left over from fuel reduction treatments, including Arizona Forest Restoration Products OSB plant in Winslow, Earth Friendly Fuels ethanol plant in the



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1300 S. Milton Road, Suite 209 ~ Flagstaff ~ Arizona ~ 86001 ~ www.gffp.org

Bellefont area, and increased coordination with the Renegy plant in Snowflake and Southwest Sustainable Forest Partnership biomass energy plant initiative throughout northern Arizona & New Mexico.

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. Major effort was directed at pre-treatment monitoring of conditions at the City Well Field and Mountaineer Partner mark sites. Post treatment data will also be collected from these two sites to see if we are implementing treatments that reflect a more diverse/heterogeneous 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. For the second year in a row, we had several questions placed in Flagstaff Omnibus Survey conducted by our Partner, the Social Research Lab at NAU. It continued to show a wide margin of social acceptance of forest treatments and the use of prescribed fire to restore ecosystems and forest structure.

Management and administration activity is essential for 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, however, financial stability continued to be a challenge. Through extensive discussion for more than a year, the Board of Directors and Partnership Advisory Board collectively developed and implemented a plan to move to restructure GFFP into an all-volunteer organization that targets our limited funding to specific project areas through contract work. Temporary action teams will be established (rather than standing work teams) to guide activities and specific programs, and then organizations or individuals with expertise specific to each task will be contracted to accomplish on-the-ground actions. We have already had success with this approach through the communications tower thinning project.

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 the many wildfires burning in the area. The result was the Grand Canyon Forests Foundation, which became GFFP in 2003. A lot has been accomplished in 2007, but we look forward to 2008 as we continue to meet the needs of Flagstaff and surrounding communities under our new structural alignment. We expect to finally see new industries established to use small diameter trees and woody biomass generated as restoration by-products in a sustainable way, complete project planning on JS/S and continue to track implementation of other projects, and implement new projects and activities that are consistent with and coordinated under with the new Statewide Strategy. Above all, we need to be sure the public knows what is going on and supports our efforts, and that more forests are restored and a higher level of protection from wildfire is provided.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to the volunteer members of the GFFP and to those agencies, organizations and individuals that provided the financial support to accomplish all that we have done. Please visit our web site at www.gffp.org to see a listing of who all these people and entities are, and to find updates of current programs, archives of past work, or just to learn more about this important, active, effective, and now over 10-year old community partnership.

Since we no longer have a permanent staff, you may contact us via email at admin@gffp.org, contact any member of the Partnership listed on our web page, or come to one of our meetings to contribute to the process.

