

# GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

## Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

### Annual Report - 2008

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 2008 followed up our transition to an all-volunteer organization. We continue to 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 been taking up less of our time and effort each year since 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 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 FS and all others) within the GFFP boundary. 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 “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; and continued management of our fuel reduction thinning projects on private land within the CWPP area.

**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 completed the UA Forest Health grant and continues to receive State Fire Assistance program grants to provide cost-share assistance to cover a portion of the cost of treating private lands within the Flagstaff wildland/urban interface. To date, approximately \$216,300 has been distributed to property owners to treat 794 acres of land. Our targeted program to treat strategic acres through Flagstaff Fire Department and the Highlands, Fire District resulted in Little America Hotel completing treatment of 158 additional high priority acres (248 total), and also involved crews from CREC (Coconino Rural Environment Corps). A new Western Bark Beetle Initiative grant for \$147,000 has recently been approved for addressing forest health on additional private lands through 2010. In addition, the Fire Wise kiosk at the Arboretum is almost complete, which used another SFA grant for public education.

**Utilization and economic development** opportunities continue to be actively pursued. To reduce treatment costs cost to the federal government for thinning forests to reduce fuel loads, we have been working with 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 no new businesses have been created and the 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 bioenergy options for utilization of woody forest biomass as a feedstock, including NAU and with CRER (Community Renewable Energy Resources) of northern Arizona & New Mexico.



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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. 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 towards post-treatment monitoring of conditions at the City Well Field site. We also completed pre-treatment monitoring of all three “partner mark” sites. Post treatment data will also be collected from these sites after thinning. Our goal is to implement 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, and only monitoring will confirm if that has been achieved. A study was designed and initiated to evaluate potential health responses to smoke and identify methods to improve project implementation and reduce smoke emissions.

**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 & 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 2008, but we look forward to the future as we continue to meet the needs of Flagstaff and surrounding communities with volunteer effort. In 2009 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*.

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](http://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 10-year old community partnership.

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

