

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

Annual Report – 2023

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is a respected community-based organization that supports collaborative efforts and has been a leader in examining and demonstrating approaches to forest ecosystem restoration in the ponderosa pine forests surrounding Flagstaff, Arizona since 1996. GFFP continues to help lead a shift in public understanding and support for proactive forest management that is designed to increase awareness of threats our forested communities face and the proactive solutions underway to reduce community risk. GFFP is one of the longest



standing forest restoration collaborative organizations in the country and has been recognized as a national model. Various organizations are represented within GFFP including academic; private; and municipal, state, and federal agencies.

Our Vision: To research and demonstrate the various approaches to forest ecosystem restoration in the ponderosa pine forests, our actions are based on improving the overall sustainability and resiliency of the forests in the greater Flagstaff area. Sustainable and resilient forests are those that have the capacity to recover to pre-disturbance composition, structure, and/or function over time and can be maintained for future generations of forest users. As GFFP works toward future sustainability and resiliency of our forests and communities, our efforts focus on 1) multi-agency planning and coordinated and complimentary implementation of forest restoration projects, 2) monitoring and adaptive management, 3) utilization of woody biomass, and 4) outreach and education.

In 2023, GFFP's workplan and accomplishments were focused on the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FAC Net), a Community Wildfire Defense Grant proposal, and in identifying high priority, non-federal land in need of forest treatments (e.g., thinning trees and prescribed fire). This year, several GFFP Board members served as chair of the 4FRI Stakeholder Group and Steering Committee, and these efforts have provided substantial impacts that contribute to increasing accomplishments of this Initiative across Northern Arizona. GFFP is also the primary stakeholder group for the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP) and works with and assists the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) and the City of Flagstaff as needed.

Planning and Implementation. This year, GFFP submitted a proposal with a federally funded program known as the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) that was authorized by the Biden Administrations' Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The CWDG's main goal is to assist at-risk local communities and Tribes to plan for and reduce wildfire risk. GFFP submitted a proposal to complete a novel, actionable plan: "A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Rural Fire Districts and Tribal Communities in Coconino County." Although the Greater Flagstaff Area (GFA) has a long history of planning for and mitigating wildfire risk, rural areas, outside of the GFA, lack up-to-date wildfire mitigation planning. Given these underserved rural fire districts and tribal communities have experienced increased frequency and intensity of large wildfires and post-wildfire flooding over the last few decades, GFFP understood the need to plan for the next inevitable wildfire. If awarded, 10 rural fire districts and six tribal communities will be represented in the CWPP and each will have separate priorities, analyses, and a unique collaboratively developed action plan. Having a CWPP in place will translate into increased ability to implement prioritized on-the-ground projects designed to directly reduce wildfire risk. Many partners will assist GFFP in completing this novel CWPP like Coconino County, USFS, Arizona Department of Forestry & Fire Management (AZDFFM), Natural Resource Conservation District and the Ecological Restoration Institute.



Photo courtesy of CWDG Press Kit

Parcels within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) are continuously identified by GFFP for potential cost-share grant proposals. These grants encourage and fund on-the-ground forest restoration treatments on private and non-federal land, adjacent to and complimenting treatment areas on federal land. GFFP Partners will continue to capitalize on opportunities to reach out to the community with messaging that highlights the effects of these treatments, and overall forest health and FireWise principles. Since

2004, the cost share program has resulted in total funding of upwards of \$2 million that has been distributed to property owners to treat approximately 3,333 acres of land.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management. GFFP continues to support monitoring programs, like 4FRI’s Multi-Party Monitoring Board. Based on monitoring results, application of lessons learned promote adaptive management and enhanced economic, social, and ecological outcomes and programmatic sustainability.

Public Outreach and Education. This is the eleventh year that GFFP participated as a national member of FAC Net. FAC Net supports the Partnership to develop and share best practices and innovations that accelerate the adoption of fire adapted community concepts and actions. Notable FAC Net activities completed this year included: 1) chaired the Wood Utilization Community of Practice (WUCOP) to encourage forest byproduct utilization strategies across the west; 2) completed a WUCOP needs assessment to better understand the future objectives and the direction of this Community of Practice; 3) developed a wood utilization resource list that will assist WUCOP members in advancing wood utilization and overall forest health and resilience; and 4) attended and presented at FAC Net’s Annual Workshop. This workshop offered the opportunity to connect and network with wildfire practitioners across the country. In partnership with Northern Arizona University’s (NAU) School of Forestry, GFFP, the City of Flagstaff, and Wood For Life presented to NAU’s Ecological Restoration class on a field tour to Observatory Mesa (part of FWPP). GFFP also hosted the Director and Deputy Director of the AZDFFM on a field tour to showcase GFFP projects. The projects included several kiosks, designed to inform and educate the public, in Ft Tuthill County Park, and a recently completed AZDFFM funded cost-share project in which GFFP oversaw forest thinning on 133 acres adjacent to the Park and a few miles from Flagstaff’s westside city center.



GFFP Kiosk at Fort Tuthill

Utilization and Economic Development. The Partnership continued involvement with stakeholders to pursue and promote new ways of reducing treatment costs, modify forest density and fuel loads, minimize fire risk, while promoting economically viable solutions to forest restoration efforts. GFFP continues to seek opportunities to support businesses that use woody biomass by-products from local forest restoration projects. To facilitate biomass utilization, a working group within GFFP, the Forest Biomass Coalition (FBC), was initiated at the end of 2022. This working group looks to address the lack of forest biomass processing facilities across northern Arizona. Throughout the year, the FBC has engaged with local, county and statewide leadership, as well as potential fledgling industries, to increase the pace and scale of biomass processing. Promoting biomass consumption and production reduces pile burning and associated smoke and wildfire risk.

Management and Administration. The Partnership targets limited funding to specific project areas through contract work. Partners help to develop and guide activities and specific programs and organizations or individuals with expertise specific to each task are contracted to complete the work. The Partnership also secures external grant funding to supplement our work. The GFFP website (gffp.org) continues to be updated to reflect the GFFP’s direction and accomplishments. The Board of Directors meets monthly to review financial status, complete other administrative duties, and coordinates with and oversees project contractors. This model, initiated in 2008, has assisted with our financial viability and has proved effective. As a result, administrative expenses are limited to accounting, insurance, office space/supplies, and website maintenance.

Looking Forward. In 1996, the Partnership began efforts to determine how the community should address the forest health crisis and reduce risk to Flagstaff from threats from severe wildfires burning in the area. We’ve come a long way.

In 2024, GFFP plans to provide:

- hosting and supporting professional forums, like FBC, and acting as a collaborative entity to achieve Partners’ goals;
- oversight for implementation of the 4FRI ‘s first and second analysis areas across northern Arizona;
- support for FWPP efforts through a collaborative forum, public engagement, and complimentary treatments;
- funding for and implementation of on-the-ground treatments for targeted private and non-federal lands;
- support for the Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program and other initiatives in the Infrastructure Act;
- increased awareness, mitigation, and resilience to wildfire through implementing FAC Net activities across Arizona;
- promotion of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: 1) resilient landscapes, 2) fire adapted communities, and 3) safe and effective wildfire response;
- support for and participation in regional workshops/conferences that assist restoration efforts and our goals; and
- development and implementation of monitoring and adaptive management to assure effectiveness in our work.

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