

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Communities

Annual Report – 2024

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 and across Northern Arizona, since 1996. GFFP continues to lead a shift in public understanding and support for preemptive 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 and throughout Northern Arizona. 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 2024, GFFP's workplan and accomplishments focused on four main areas 1) Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), 2) Community Wildfire Defense Grant award, 3) Lowell Observatory Fuels Reduction Project, 4) Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network, and 5) identifying high priority non-federal land in need of forest treatments (e.g., thinning trees and prescribed fire). 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.



Photo courtesy of CWDG Press Kit

Planning and Implementation. Community Wildfire Defense Grant Award (CWDG).

This year, GFFP was awarded a CWDG, authorized by the Biden Administration's Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The CWDG's main goal is to assist underserved and underrepresented at-risk local communities and Tribes to plan for and reduce wildfire risk and associated post-wildfire flooding. This award will fund completion of a novel, actionable plan - "A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Rural Fire Districts and Tribal Communities in Coconino County." This CWPP will include 10 rural fire districts and six tribal communities throughout rural Coconino County who lack up-to-date wildfire

mitigation planning. Each community will have separate priorities, analyses, and a unique collaboratively developed "Action Plan." The associated Action Plans will outline priorities for each fire district and tribe so that these communities have the blueprint that they need to apply for funding and implement associated projects designed to directly reduce wildfire risk. The Greater Flagstaff Area (GFA) has a long history of planning for and mitigating wildfire risk. Accordingly, the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council (PFAC) was also awarded a CWDG to update the GFA's CWPP. As the two CWPP's are developed and updated, GFFP and PFAC will work together to assure that these plans are aligned. Many partners will assist GFFP in completing this novel CWPP like Coconino County, City of Flagstaff, USFS, Arizona Department of Forestry & Fire Management, Natural Resource Conservation District, Salt River Project and the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI).

Lowell Observatory Fuels Reduction Project. Through the leadership of Arizona Senators Mark Kelly and Kyrsten Sinema, a recently passed bipartisan appropriation bill included funding to GFFP for the "Lowell Observatory Fuels Reduction Project." This fuels reduction project will occur on 672 acres, owned by Lowell Observatory, that comprise Section 17 and Mars Hill. Section 17 is the last parcel on Observatory Mesa in need of forest treatments. A broad community outreach program will be developed so that community members are informed about the expected operations, the benefits this project will provide, and to address any concerns. Thinning small diameter trees and removal of the associated biomass will reduce wildfire risk and improve the overall resiliency of the forest to the Observatory, City of Flagstaff and Coconino County. GFFP would like to thank

partners who are supporting this project: Coconino County Flood Control District, City of Flagstaff Fire Department, and Lowell Observatory. The project is expected to begin in the spring of 2025.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management. GFFP continues to support monitoring programs, like the recently released economic analysis of the 4FRI, “Regional Economic Contributions of the Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI) in Northern Arizona in 2023.” Based on these monitoring results, application of lessons learned promote adaptive management and illustrate enhanced economic, social, and ecological outcomes and the programmatic sustainability these projects provide.

Public Outreach and Education. This is the twelfth year that GFFP participated as a national member of the Fire Adapted Community Learning Network (FACLN). FACLN supports the Partnership to develop and share best practices and innovations that accelerate the adoption of fire adapted community concepts and actions. Through FACLN, GFFP chaired the Wood Utilization Community of Practice to encourage forest byproduct utilization strategies across the west. GFFP presented to the visiting Wildland Fire Leadership Council on the recent accomplishments the Partnership achieved in minimizing wildfire risk and promoting fire adapted community concepts. This summer, GFFP, the USFS and local loggers hosted Partners on a field tour to learn about the thinning that was occurring on the “Wing East IRSC Project.” Lastly, in partnership with Northern Arizona University’s (NAU) School of Forestry, GFFP and Flagstaff Fire Department joined NAU’s ERI class on a field tour to Observatory Mesa to share experiences on local, successful restoration initiatives like FWPP.



GFFP Field Tour to Wing East

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 in 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 across northern Arizona. Promoting biomass utilization increases the pace and scale of forest restoration projects, while reducing wildfire risk, pile burning and the associated smoke.

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 held a retreat this year to reevaluate the Partnership’s direction. The Board 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, postage, 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 2025, GFFP plans to provide:

- hosting and supporting professional forums 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;
- promotion of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy and FACLN activities;
- 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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