

GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Communities

Annual Report – 2025

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 2025, GFFP's workplan and accomplishments focused on five main areas 1) Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), 2) Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) award, 3) Lowell Observatory and Thorpe Park Fuels Reduction Projects, 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 the primary stakeholder group for the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP) and works with and assists the U. S. Forest Service (USFS), the City of Flagstaff (City), and Coconino County as needed.



Blue Ridge Community Meeting

Planning and Implementation. "A Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) for Rural Fire Districts and Tribal Communities in Coconino County."

Last year, GFFP was awarded a CWDG and is working with SWCA Environmental Consultants to assist seven rural fire districts and the Hualapai Tribe in developing a novel CWPP to reduce risk of wildfire and associated post-wildfire flooding. To inform the CWPP, GFFP conducted an interview with the Hualapai Tribe and held community meetings for each fire district to better understand each community's concerns and priorities. Resulting from SWCA's ground assessments and feedback from the community meetings and public surveys, each community will have separate analyses,

priorities, and a unique collaboratively developed "Community Summary." The associated community summaries will outline priorities for each community so that they have the blueprint that they need to apply for funding and implement associated projects designed to directly reduce wildfire risk. The Greater Flagstaff Region (GFR) has a long history of planning for and mitigating wildfire risk. Accordingly, the Ponderosa Fire Advisory Council (PFAC), through the CWDG program, is updating the GFR'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 are assisting GFFP in completing this CWPP like the City, Coconino County, USFS, Arizona Department of Forestry & Fire Management (DFFM), Salt River Project (SRP) and the Ecological Restoration Institute. GFFP expects completion of the CWPP in late spring/early summer of this year.

Lowell Observatory/Thorpe Park Fuel Reduction Projects. Through the leadership of Arizona Senator Mark Kelly, a bipartisan appropriation bill included funding for GFFP to complete the "Lowell Observatory Fuels Reduction Project." This fuel reduction project will occur on approximately 700 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 treatment. Since Section 17 is adjacent to Thorpe Park, both the City and SRP have contributed leveraged funding to spur forest treatments in the largest park in the City of Flagstaff. 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 Lowell Observatory, the City and Coconino County. The project is expected to begin implementation in summer of this year.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management. This year pre- and post-LIDAR imagery will be collected and analyzed on the Lowell Observatory Fuels Reduction Project. This will provide changes in composition and structure of the ponderosa pine stands before and after thinning operations. In the end, this will reveal whether the treatments were completed as planned, and it will provide side-by-side visualization of the change before and after thinning operations. Similarly, pre- and post-drone photos will be flown so that leadership and the public can see the positive change in tree density and forest structure. Based on these monitoring results, GFFP Partners can apply lessons learned that promote adaptive management and enhance the ability to illustrate the improved ecological outcomes and programmatic sustainability that this project provides.

Public Outreach and Education. This is the thirteenth 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. This summer, GFFP, the National Forest Foundation (NFF), USFS and local loggers hosted Partners on two field tours to learn about the thinning outcomes on the Marshall Project and the FWPP. Lastly, in partnership with Northern Arizona University's (NAU) School of Forestry, GFFP and Flagstaff Fire Department joined NAU's Ecological Restoration class on a field tour to Observatory Mesa, part of the FWPP, to share experiences on local, successful restoration initiatives.



Field Tour Marshall Project

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. Correspondingly, GFFP attended DFFM's Ponderosa Pine Utilization Summit to recognize and address utilization successes and concerns. Since 2022, a working group within GFFP, the Forest Biomass Coalition (FBC), has looked to address the lack of forest biomass processing facilities across Northern Arizona. Throughout the year, the FBC has engaged with local, county, state, and federal leadership, as well as established and emerging industries, to accelerate the pace and scale of biomass processing across Northern Arizona.



Equipment Demo Marshall Project

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 complete the work. The Partnership also secures external grant funding to supplement the work. The GFFP website (gffp.org) continues to be updated to reflect the GFFP's direction and accomplishments. 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 GFFP's financial viability and has proved effective. As a result, administrative expenses are limited to accounting, insurance, office space/supplies/software, postage, and website maintenance and updates.

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 have come a long way.

In 2026, 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;
- promotion of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, FACLN, and CWDG 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

GFFP Board of Directors

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