The mission of the Forestry Division of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is to ensure sustainability of Montana forests, rural lands and communities through cooperative wildland fire protection, sound forest management practices and by promoting a viable forest-based economy.

Cooperative Forestry and Wildland Fire programs are integral to fulfilling this mission. The programs provide critical assistance to Montana landowners, communities, forest-based industries and others. These programs are administered and implemented through partnerships between DNRC, USDA Forest Service (USFS) and other private, non-profit and government entities to promote the health and productivity of Montana's forests and rural economies.

Program Goals

- Work with the Governor appointed Montana Forest Action Advisory Council, partners and citizens to make the 2020 Forest Action Plan an authoritative plan for addressing forest health and wildfire risk issues across all forested lands in Montana with an achievable, measurable plan of work in priority areas. https://www.montanaforestactionplan.org/
- Increase acres treated for fuels reduction and forest restoration on private and federal lands through partnerships with the Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, American Forest Foundation and Montana communities.
- Guide forest owners, managers and communities in stewardship objectives and promote the benefits of engaged active forest management. Increase the ability of landowners, natural resource managers and communities to meet management objectives by providing financial, technical and logistical support.
- Promote responsible, active forest management that ensures ecological conditions meet the needs of future generations for clean water, wildlife habitat, sustainable timber supply and recreation opportunities.
- Actively promote stewardship of Montana's urban and community forests.
- Promote Montana wood products, support the development of wood energy infrastructure and encourage the production of new and innovative wood products applications. Retain and bolster Montana's forest industry so that forests can be managed in an ecologically and economically practical manner.
- Assist state, private and other non-federal resource managers in identifying and managing forest insects and diseases. Participate in interagency efforts to prevent and manage non-native invasive forest pests in Montana.
- A well-rounded fire protection program incorporating, as critical components, safe and effective fire response; training, professional development and organizational learning; community preparedness,
homeowner risk reduction and fire prevention; as well as prescribed fire and hazardous fuels reduction.

- Modernize the State/County Coop (County Coop) Fire Protection arrangement to include needed legislation; resources required to achieve program guidance and performance objectives reflecting strategic direction and priorities.
- Convene an internal collaborative effort to both craft the direction on implementing the National Cohesive Fire Management Strategy and coordinate the activities of Fire Protection, Forestry Assistance, and Trust Lands Management programs to achieve mutually beneficial goals, focusing on internal cohesion.
- Complete workforce analysis and plan for workforce configuration at unit, land office, and bureau levels, with eye toward enabling capacity to necessarily align the scope of the program with the strategic vision. Develop a recruitment and retention strategy aligned with improved HR policies (temporary details, position/pay matrix, etc.) supporting the workforce development objectives of this goal.
- Understand and have defined our wildland fire information technology (WFIT) business needs and have identified how to meet those business needs in a timely and cost-effective manner. Enable us to have adequate data capture, storage and analysis systems that inform financial, strategic and programmatic decision making.
- Complete aviation strategy that includes a plan for transitioning from our current aircraft to our next generation aircraft over time; and have begun the process of preparing the Legislature for the necessary future capital expenditures to make that transition.
- Control 95% of the fires occurring on DNRC direct protection at 10 acres or less because as fires grow larger, firefighting costs rise exponentially.
- Maintain stable, adequate purchasing power in the Fire Protection Program preparedness budget and a stable fire suppression account that enables our ability to sustain our program delivery.

Key Issues

- Our agency is working to educate Montana landowners and homeowners about the fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes concepts. This is a challenging task as multiple agencies and organizations are active in communicating about these concepts. We are working on sending a unified message. We expect the 2020 Forest Action Plan to help with this effort when it is finalized in September of 2020.
- It is difficult to convince potential users that the upfront cost of wood energy installations is worth the effort when compared to fossil fuels. Not having funding to cover construction compounds this problem.
- Many small communities in Montana struggle with the capacity to manage their community forests, even with DNRC assistance. The inevitable detection of the Emerald Ash Borer will compound this problem.
- Educating the public about best management practices for tree care continues to be a challenge. For example, tree topping is a common issue.
- Small stagnant and/or shrinking budgets make it difficult to maintain adequate personnel to manage programs.
- The environment in which the DNRC Fire Protection program operates has shifted dramatically. Fire seasons are longer, fire conditions have become more severe, fires are getting larger, and “big” fire seasons occur more frequently. Forest conditions are out of balance in forest types that cover large areas of Montana where fire is no longer playing its natural role.
- In addition to increasingly severe fire conditions, Montana has a wildland-urban interface (WUI) problem that demands more fire protection resources, mitigation services and assistance community preparedness. Over the past 17 years, the number of homes in high wildfire hazard areas in Montana nearly doubled. Increasing human habitation at the WUI requires more fire prevention, mitigation, community preparedness and fire suppression resources to enable the DNRC to redeem its responsibilities.
- The State County Cooperative Fire (County Coop) Program is enormously important to our success and provides an estimated annual economic value of $45 million to Montana taxpayers (vs. providing direct protection on 45 million acres of NFZ land). However, not only is the County Coop Program
based on a 50-year-old model that no longer reflects operating realities, it faces significant
challenges, including a severely declining volunteer workforce and evolving expectations of what the
DNRC can do.

- More than 85% of our partnering local government fire departments are staffed solely by volunteer
firefighters. Like fire departments across the nation, the fire services in Montana struggle to recruit
and retain volunteers. Consequently, many volunteer fire departments in the state have much smaller
memberships than they’ve had in the past and the average age of the members they do have is
growing. In addition, volunteer firefighters are not as available as they used to be.
- DNRC has identified a need to emphasize fire investigation and billing.
- Over time, repeated budget reductions and rising operating costs have eroded the purchasing power
of the Fire and Aviation Management Program budget, and a continuation of these trends will
challenge the fiscal sustainability of our current approach to program delivery.
- Taking an interagency approach improves efficiency, enables more cost-effective services to
Montana taxpayers and strengthens the overall effectiveness of Montana’s wildland fire service.
However, interagency coordination and cooperation also requires staffing for interagency dispatch
and coordination centers, inter-operable radio communication, equipment and training that meet
interagency standards and other fire protection preparedness costs that make interagency operations
possible.
- We need to develop our workforce of the future today to assure that we have a motivated, productive
and engaged workforce, guided by well-prepared leaders. However, we face challenges when it
comes to recruiting, developing and retaining the workforce the DNRC will need to remain effective in
the future.
- The DNRC’s need for accurate data and information resources needs are large, complex and critical
to our success. Currently, the DNRC Fire program lacks adequate data capture systems to reliably
inform either strategic or programmatic decision making.
- RY Timber recently announced the closure of their Townsend MT mill. The reason given for the
closure is lack of timber supply due to litigation of Forest Service timber sales. This closure will result
in a smaller market and higher transportation costs for public and private timber.

### Forest Facts and Accomplishments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Facts</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>989,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of Forest Land</td>
<td>25,868,764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land</td>
<td>5,430,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of NIPF Landowners</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection</td>
<td>1,698,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection</td>
<td>2,658,952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Rural Fire Departments</td>
<td>385</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities and Towns</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Based Employment</td>
<td>6,530</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Forestry Budget (All Sources)</td>
<td>14,422,960</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FY 2019 Accomplishments</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance</td>
<td>1,325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans</td>
<td>8,161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans</td>
<td>4,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted</td>
<td>324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Fire Communities Assisted</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coop Forest Health Acres Protected</td>
<td>15,155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions</td>
<td>25,475</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance</td>
<td>471,759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance</td>
<td>6,755</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Program Highlights

#### 2020 Forest Action Plan Update
Governor Steve Bullock on May 20, 2019, signed an Executive Order forming the Montana Forest Action
Advisory Council, a statewide collaborative group charged with updating the Montana Forest Action Plan
to address long-term efforts to conserve working forest lands, protect forests from harm, and enhance public benefits from forests throughout the state.

Members of the Forest Action Council are appointed by the Governor and represent a diverse array of expertise, interests, and perspectives including tribal, local, state, and federal governments; forest products industry partners; conservation organizations; collaborative and watershed groups; and recreation and tourism partners.

The Forest Action Plan will assess statewide forest conditions, identify priority areas for treatment, and develop cross-boundary solutions to accomplish landscape-scale forest restoration as called for in the Governor's Forests in Focus 2.0 Initiative released last September.

"The revision of the Montana Forest Action Plan offers Montana a chance to address wildland fire risk and forest health issues across ownership boundaries on forests throughout the state and at scales that make meaningful change in and around our communities." says the Governor.

**Community Forestry and Open Space**

Montana will be submitting a Community Forestry and Open Space application in FY 2020 for the Upper Smith Creek Community Forest. This proposal is for 160 acres located 9 miles north of the city of Whitefish MT. This property will add to the significant amount of conservation activity on the north end of Whitefish Lake, including 23,488 acres of conservation easements funded by the Forest Legacy Program and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Conservation Plan Land Acquisition Program.

**Conservation Education**

In 2019, Conservation Education funds supported facilitator and participant engagement in many education activities throughout Montana. Efforts included:
- Conducted 3 workshops to train 35 educators and natural resource professionals in the use of Project Learning Tree (PLT) program. Facilitated a survey of PLT educators to determine value, benefit and needs pertaining to PLT. Over 100 responses were received.
- Conservation educators put skills to practice at the 33rd annual Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp, attended by 17 youth (ages 14 to 17) in July 2019.
- Provided support for 5 "walk in the woods" tours during Montana's annual Forest Products Week in October. Audience participants included students and educators, the general public, natural resource professionals, and local business owners. Activities were focused around forest ecology walks, visits to active forest management projects, wood processing mills, and local business utilizing Montana wood products.

**Cooperative Fire Protection**

The Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA) has been renamed the Rural Fire Capacity Program. It provided local government fire entities with $410,797 in grant funds in Fiscal Year 2020. These will be used to organize, train and equip firefighters to prevent and suppress wildfires. DNRC administers these funds annually.

State Fire Assistance (SFA) funding supported Keep Montana Green's wildfire prevention art contest, in which over 3,000 students participated. This annual event educates K-12 youth in ways they can prevent human-caused wildfires. Funds were used to have an employee coordinate fire prevention and fire adapted communities work, which includes Keep Montana Green activities and the development of a Montana Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network.

**Forest Health Protection**

The Forest Pest Management Program continued to provide identification, surveillance and management of forest pests on State, municipal, county and private lands throughout the state. Douglas-fir tussock moth egg mass surveys were conducted to delimit extent of outbreak and to determine the likelihood of a sustained outbreak. Pheromone-baited traps were set to detect gypsy moth and also spruce engraver beetles. Professional foresters, fire personnel, and tree care specialists were trained to identify and appropriately manage forest insects and diseases. Western Bark Beetle Initiative funds were sub-awarded to non-federal land management entities to treat stands to reduce susceptibility to bark beetles.

**Forest Legacy**
Montana's Forest Legacy Program is administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in consultation with the Montana Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee (Stewardship Advisory Committee), which serves in an advisory role to recommend projects for submission and to provide feedback on applications. In 2019, Phase 2 of the Whitefish Lake Watershed project, also known as the Lazy Creek Conservation Easement, was finalized with a contribution from the Forest Legacy Program. Along with Phase 1, which was also completed using Forest Legacy funds, these easements protect critically important fish and wildlife habitat from residential development, provide continued recreational access, and will be actively managed as working forests to provide critical timber supply to northwest Montana's mills and forest industry workers. These projects added over 6,000 acres to the DNRC's Stillwater State Forest, increasing potential revenue for Montana's trust lands beneficiaries.

Montana submitted the 7,200-acre Lost Trail Conservation Easement Project for the national competition during fall 2018. In January 2019, the Lost Trail Project ranked in the top tier of projects for receiving funding. With passage of the 2020 budget in December 2019, funding has been allocated to these Forest Legacy projects. We are hopeful that the Lost Trail Conservation Easement will receive notice of funding early in calendar year 2020.

**Forest Stewardship**

In 2019, Montana's Forest Stewardship Program developed 5 plans with NRCS EQIP, furnished technical assistance to 974 landowners, and provided education to 351 individuals. DNRC's partnership with Montana State University Extension Forestry provided 5 Forest Stewardship workshops with a total of 103 participants, resulting in 52 Forest Stewardship Plans. Currently, the state has 424 active plans totaling 74,431 acres of private land under new and revised Forest Stewardship Plans. This work was accomplished by DNRC service foresters, a DNRC stewardship program manager and stewardship specialist, and through partnerships with the Montana Tree Farm Program, the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation, and numerous other federal, state, and non-profit partners.

**Landowner Assistance**

In 2019, the DNRC continued to leverage technical and financial assistance aimed at reducing wildfire risk on private land for the Golden Crown Stewardship Initiative in central Montana. 250 acres were treated in 2019, with an additional 200 acres slated for 2020. This project, in partnership with American Forest Foundation, has spurred a new initiative in northwest Montana. This new initiative, called the Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative or KFRI, has resulted in nearly 100 landowners receiving technical assistance from a consulting forester or experienced Montana tree farm mentor in 2019. Fifty projects focusing on wildfire risk reduction and commercial forest management are slated to commence in 2020 as a result of this outreach and engagement.

**Landscape Scale Restoration**

The Trees in Tribal Communities grant delivered multiple successful projects in 2019. One of these projects established an edible forest garden with cultural trees and plants on Polson schools within the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, which was recognized by the EPA with a Regional Education Award. Another highly successful event included planting shelter trees for Blackfeet Community College and providing over 400 tree seedlings and educational assistance to the public for a community wide Earth Day Celebration in Browning.

Riparian restoration projects on the Gallatin River and the Big Hole River planted over 1,000 deciduous trees and shrubs and stabilized over 2,000 feet of stream degrading stream banks. Additionally, 3.5 miles of exclusion fencing was installed to manage livestock impacts in the riparian areas.

In the Blackfoot River watershed, more than 400 acres were managed to improve stand composition and forest heath, as well as reduce wildfire risk in this important landscape. Cooperative burn-plan development occurred, paving the way for prescribed fire activity on over 250 acres in 2020 that is focused on maintaining mature old-growth forests and meadows encroached on by conifers. A combined 10.5 miles of exclusion fencing was installed to manage livestock impacts in the riparian areas.

**Urban and Community Forestry**

Montana's Urban & Community Forestry Program made significant progress on raising public awareness and bringing a 'small projects – big impact' impression throughout the state. The strong relationship with
the program's advisory council Montana Urban Community Forestry Association generated more opportunities for entities to receive mini-grants for unique urban forestry projects. Some examples include EAB planning and ash tree management for the town of Big Timber; adding new tree species for the Yellowstone Arboretum. The University of Montana Arboretum launched a Trees and Climate - themed campaign that featured experts and guest speakers.

USFS and DNRC are working on a pilot project that will complement on-going efforts to address community forest management and wildfire risk. Knowing the location of structures and vegetation is key to minimizing wildfire risk, yet fire managers typically use coarse-level data sets to understand risk, prioritize outreach, and plan mitigation activities in the WUI. This project will combine the expertise of researchers, state and local fire managers, and local community leaders/forest managers to address community canopy goals and wildfire management/defensible space goals through high-resolution land cover mapping. Project partners are creating high-resolution maps for the Helena area using LiDAR and artificial intelligence-based image detection of aerial imagery (National Agricultural Imagery Program). These data will provide: location of forest and wildland vegetation, at 1-meter resolution; location of buildings (homes, structures), at 1-meter resolution; and the extent and height of vegetation, including around buildings, at 1 m resolution. Combined, these data will provide a highly detailed map of forested landscapes and their residents that will help partners answer important management questions.

**Contact Information**

**Montana Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation**
Sonya Germann  
State Forester  
2705 Spurgin Road  
Missoula, MT 59804  
406-542-4301  
sgermann@mt.gov

**US Forest Service**
Northern Region  
Tim Garcia  
Director, State & Private Forestry  
USDA Forest Service  
200 East Broadway  
Missoula, MT 59807  
406-329-3250  
timothy.p.garcia@usda.gov