



# State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

## Alaska 2021



### Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2020 Final
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$1,368,000
Forest Legacy	\$0
Forest Stewardship	\$290,000
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$1,666,703
Urban and Community Forestry	\$390,000
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$235,812
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$3,950,515</b>

NOTE: This funding is for all entities within the state, not just the State Forester's office.

State and Private Forestry programs provide technical, educational, and financial assistance to landowners, resource managers, cities, and communities with a primary goal of maintaining and improving the health, sustainability and productivity of Alaska's urban and rural forests and related economies. These programs are delivered to our customers through a partnership between the State of Alaska and the USDA Forest Service, in cooperation with many private and other government entities.

### Program Goals

- Increase cost-effectiveness through the use of partnerships in delivery.
- Increase values through sustained productivity of urban and rural forests.
- Utilize voluntary and non-regulatory approaches.

### Key Issues

- Threats to Alaska's communities and forests from wildfire in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) has been a challenge for decades, especially where hazardous fuels build up occurs due to past and recent increased spruce beetle activity. The 2020 wildfire season was below average with 180,946.2 acres burned for 348 fires, falling outside of the trend of an increasing number of fires and acres burned annually.
- Invasive and exotic species are a growing threat to Alaska's forested ecosystems and many invasive species are established in the state. Partnerships increase our ability to detect and respond to new infestations. Collaborative partnerships and grant programs focus on efforts to remove invasive cherry trees, *Prunus padus* and *Prunus virginiana*, as well as to monitor the state for invasive forest insects and manage those already established.
- As communities expand so does the need to manage their natural resources. However, Alaska communities lack public and private sector arborists and urban foresters to manage public trees and forests. Providing technical and financial assistance helps communities maximize the environmental, social, and economic benefits of trees, including clean air and water, stormwater treatment, enhanced aesthetics and property values, and habitat for wildlife.
- Climate-related forest health problems have already been documented in Alaska (i.e., spruce beetle outbreaks, yellow-cedar decline, and record wildfire seasons). More applied research on climate change is needed so forest managers can develop strategies to help Alaskans adapt and prepare.
- Alaska's villages need renewable energy opportunities to supplement heating and power. Woody biomass, which could be used as a source of energy, is readily available from milling residues in Southeast and as a by-product of hazardous fuel and other treatments in Southcentral and Interior. Cost effective reforestation after timber harvest in the boreal forest is a challenge and will need to be

addressed as harvests for wood energy are conducted.

- A spruce beetle outbreak occurring in Southcentral has affected over one million acres since 2016. The outbreak has impacted the Matanuska-Susitna and Kenai Peninsula Boroughs and Anchorage most severely and is now expanding in the Denali Borough as well. The resulting multitude of dead trees on the landscape are affecting infrastructure, recreation, tourism, public safety, and fire behavior. Mitigation efforts include hazard tree removals and hazard fuels reduction in high priority areas.

## Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2020 Accomplishments	Value
Population	710,231	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	129
Acres of Forest Land	128,577,000	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	90,954
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	35,875,000	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	59,139
Number of NIPF Landowners	82,000	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	54
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	88,700,000	State Fire Communities Assisted	81
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	1,250,452	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	2,897
Number of Rural Fire Departments	256	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	148	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	4
Forest Based Employment	2,000	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	372,364
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	5	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	856
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	66,822,100		

## Program Highlights

### Conservation Education

State & Private Forestry allocated \$89,000 to Project Learning Tree (PLT) in Alaska. This funding is being used to support 75% of a position for at least two years, starting in July 2020. PLT, overseen by Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), is a nationwide program providing K-12 outdoor educational curriculum and training to help educators bring the natural world, including forestry, into the classroom--or bring the classroom to the outdoors. The Forest Stewardship Program has been able to fund PLT in Alaska at a low level for many years, but thanks to this one-time funding there will be a fulltime PLT coordinator for at least two years. The Stewardship program is providing this funding in the form of a sub-grant to the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts, which houses the position. The long-term goal for this position is to become self-funded through competitive grants. <https://www.plt.org/>

In 2020, each class from Talkeetna Elementary (one of the recipients of DOF's NASF Community Tree Grant) participated in outdoor learning experiences with Project Learning Tree activities, utilizing their wooded nature trail and classroom in the woods. Older students studied trees they "adopted" in a birch stand in their schoolyard, learning to take measurements such as DBH.

Molly Gillespie, the Alaska PLT Coordinator, hosted a "Meet a Forester" event with the Girl Scouts of Alaska, with girls who were working toward their STEM Careers patch. Girls were introduced to careers in forestry and conservation, learned what STEM skills are helpful or necessary for those careers, and got to hear from a woman in forestry who enhances wildlife habitat by prescribed burns.

New PLT activity bundles are being developed that can be used for remote or virtual learning, with themes such as "Biodiversity Blitz", "Sensational Trees", and "Discover your Urban Forest".

### Cooperative Fire Protection

The Alaska Division of Forestry (DOF) protects the majority of the wildland-urban interface (WUI) and road-accessible areas in the state, approximately 40% of forested lands. The USFS provides DOF assistance through State Fire Assistance (WFCF) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (WFVF). In FY20 \$1,902,515 (SFS & VFA) was allocated to help hire, train, and equip 1,486 firefighters for statewide and

national deployments. SFA funds fire prevention, education programs, and fire management, focusing on partnerships and interagency coordination and cooperation. Also, in 2020 \$449,325 funded two competitive Western WUI grant projects: Alaska Fuels Mapping Improvement Phase 1 and Delta River West Hazard Fuels Mitigation. SFA program dollars funded 32 prevention and education programs for schools, civic groups, youth organizations, and homeowners. Although numbers were down from previous years in all program areas due to COVID-19 concerns, DOF updated 1 CWPP, conducted 139 consultations and/or fire risk assessments, and conducted 116 follow-up home inspections. Volunteer Fire Assistance (WVVF) funds are used to increase wildland firefighting safety, improve firefighting capabilities of rural fire departments, and enhance protection in the WUI. VFA funds provided \$225,000 to assist 34 rural fire departments. 471 volunteer firefighters received training from DOF, and 14 fire departments sent firefighters on national assignments. There is still a small amount of FEPP equipment assigned to cooperating volunteer fire departments. Migration to the Firefighter Property Program (FFP) slowly continues as staff capacity allows. DOF continues to dispose of federal excess equipment and supplies that no longer meet the needs of DOF or its local government cooperators.

### **Forest Health Protection**

The Division of Forestry Forest Health (DOF) program provides a wide range of assistance to forest landowners, resource managers, and others, and is a primary source of forest health expertise in the state. The program focuses on monitoring native and invasive forest pests, pest management, technology development, and technical assistance. In a typical year, the main way Alaska's forests are monitored is through cooperative DOF and USDA Forest Service Forest Health Protection (FHP) aerial pest detection surveys. These surveys were cancelled in 2020, however, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In place of these typical surveys, an alternative strategy to survey the state's forests was developed by DOF and FHP survey specialists. This alternative strategy combined road-based ground surveys, manual interpretation of high-resolution imagery, and remote sensing efforts. As a result, the data collected in 2020 lack direct comparability to that of previous years.

The 2020 efforts prioritized areas affected by ongoing forest insect outbreaks and other high priority forest health issues for high-resolution imagery acquisition. In terms of acres of damage observed, the top three damage agents documented during the surveys in 2020 were hemlock sawfly, spruce beetle, and aspen leafminer.

In 2020, DOF initiated a Western Bark Beetle Initiative (WBBI) cost-share program to assist non-federal landowners with bark beetle prevention, suppression, and restoration efforts. Interest in the program has been high within the spruce beetle outbreak area, with more than 100 applications received. Thus far, 27 properties have been assessed, totaling roughly 1,100 acres, and grant agreements are being drafted.

Additional efforts included two studies focused on protecting trees from spruce beetle attack and a variety of outreach endeavors. DOF Forest Health Program staff provided forest health assistance or information to about 730 individuals in 2020.

### **Forest Stewardship**

The Forest Stewardship Program--delivered by the Alaska Division of Forestry--uses 100% federal funding from US Forest Service to deliver technical forestry assistance to Alaskan landowners. Goals include increasing economic & environmental benefits of forest land, reducing fire risk across the wildland urban interface, increasing energy independence of remote communities through bioenergy, and helping landowners restore degraded or damaged forests. Stewardship Plans qualify landowners for management practice implementation funding through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Plans are written for private individual landowners and Alaska Native corporations, which are the largest landowners in the state. In FY2020, two private individual landowners with more than 260 combined acres of forest land used their Stewardship Plans to apply for cost-share funding for wildlife habitat enhancement, timber stand improvement, tree planting, and hazardous fuel treatment. In total, 42 individual landowners received plans for 2,020 acres in FY2020. Three Alaska Native corporations received Stewardship Plans for 89,000 acres, with NRCS cost-sharing and pre-commercial thinning prescriptions primary goals. Since the program began in 1992, more than 7.4 million acres in Alaska have been sustainably managed under Forest Stewardship Plans. Administration of wildfire defensible space sub-grants (CWSF competitively funded) led to completion of over 100 home safety improvements (spruce thinning and removal). These grants allow the two Stewardship foresters to reach more

homeowners, focusing on wildfire prevention through effective forest management. Pre-COVID virtual meetings covering Firewise forest management were held for Haines and Skagway, which proved to be the way of the future; virtual presentations and website content will help expand the ability of the Stewardship Program to reach landowners who are unable to be served by the staff of two service foresters.

### **Landscape Scale Restoration**

Work was completed on the Chena River Restoration Project Landscape Scale Restoration grant.

A highlight pre-COVID For the Fish Need A Forest: Campbell Creek Landscape Scale Restoration grant in Anchorage was the participation of 150 middle school students in a tree planting project at Campbell Park in October 2019. Progress on the remainder of the grant was slowed in the summer of 2020 by COVID restrictions.

### **Urban and Community Forestry**

The mission of the Alaska Community Forestry program is to help communities build effective, self-sustaining community forestry programs with strong local support. This is the only agency in Alaska that exists to provide technical and financial assistance and educational opportunities that develop and support local community forestry.

Program staff provided grants, technical assistance and/or training to local governments, agencies, organizations, businesses and individuals in 19 communities: Anchorage, Joint Base Elmendorf Richardson, Eielson AFB, Fairbanks, Fort Greely, Fort Wainwright, Georgetown, Homer, Houston, Juneau, Ketchikan, Metlakatla, Nondalton, Palmer, Port Graham, Salcha, Sterling, Talkeetna and Wasilla.

Staff gave presentations at the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortiums Tribal Capacity & Training Program and at the Alaska Forum on the Environment in February. The UCF program helped organize the "Anchorage Community Tree Forum" in February. The forum was requested by citizens to address the future of Anchorage trees on public and private lands due to the high levels of mortality caused by spruce beetles and the threat from invasive tree species. Representatives from the Alaska Community Forest Council, UAF Cooperative Extension Service Invasive Species Program, the Division of Agriculture, DOF, the Municipality of Anchorage, local media and two private tree care companies made up the panel.

Six communities attained Tree City USA status. The state's 3 major electric utilities were certified as Tree Line USA utilities, and the University of Alaska-Anchorage was certified as a Tree Campus USA.

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## **Contact Information**



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