



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Montana 2021



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2020 Final
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$682,777
Forest Legacy	\$2,875,000
Forest Stewardship	\$211,787
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$0
State Fire Assistance	\$2,624,315
Urban and Community Forestry	\$313,971
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$435,913
Total	\$7,143,763

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

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 create resilient forests, and build sustainable economies and vibrant communities.

Program Goals

- Use the Montana Forest Action Plan to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk to communities, while increasing the pace and scale of coordinated landscape level forest management in Montana. <https://www.montanaforestactionplan.org/>
 To accelerate this effort the State of Montana has allocated \$4.5 million and the Forest Service has contributed \$500,000 in Shared Stewardship funds for implementation of projects within the priority areas of focused attention.
- Increase acres treated for fuels reduction and forest health 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, homeowners and the public about the concepts and benefits of fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes. We are using the newly released Forest Action Plan as one of our main platforms to communicate these concepts and convince people to make the investments necessary to create fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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 still a common issue.
- 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.

- Small, stagnant and /or shrinking budgets make it difficult to maintain adequate personnel to manage programs.
- 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 in 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.
- 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

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2020 Accomplishments	Value
Population	989,415	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	1,543
Acres of Forest Land	25,779,495	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	11,893
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	5,430,000	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	9,474
Number of NIPF Landowners	40,000	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	294
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	1,698,462	State Fire Communities Assisted	256
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	2,658,952	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	1,654
Number of Rural Fire Departments	385	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	127	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	46
Forest Based Employment	6,530	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	459,666
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	2,260
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	14,422,960		

Program Highlights

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 Action Plan Implementation Program

Program Goal and Purpose: Provide financial support for the implementation of projects as part of the Montana Forest Action Plan (MFAP). The MFAP is Montana's all lands, all hands plan for addressing forest health and wildfire risk issues across the state of Montana. The plan consists of a Statewide Assessment of Forest Conditions, designated Priority Areas for Focused Attention, and a set of Recommended Goals and Strategies to achieve cross-boundary forest restoration and management. www.montanaforestactionplan.org.

To accelerate this implementation program, the state of Montana has allocated \$4.5 million and the Forest Service has provided \$500,000 in Shared Stewardship funding. The funds are being used to create a grant program to accelerate the pace and scale of forest management in order to reduce wildland fire hazards, improve forest health and increase restoration activities on Montana's forested lands.

This program is administered by the Forestry Division of Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) and assisted by the Montana Forest Action Plan Implementation Committee, which was established by the Montana Forest Action Advisory Committee (MFAAC).

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 2020, the 7,200-acre Lost Trail Conservation Easement Project was 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.

Forest Stewardship

In 2020, Montana's Forest Stewardship Program developed 11 plans with NRCS EQIP, furnished technical assistance to 1,014 landowners, and provided education to 529 individuals. DNRC's partnership with Montana State University Extension Forestry provided 4 Forest Stewardship workshops with a total of 130 participants, resulting in 122 Forest Stewardship Plans. Currently, the state has 546 active plans totaling 72,928 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.

The Stewardship Program is also working to integrate WUI grants and LSR grants into the Forest Action Plan Implementation process. This will be facilitated by the Montana Forest Action Advisory Committee (FAPIC), which was established by the Montana Forest Action Advisory Committee. The purpose of the FAPIC is to advocate and assist with the implementation of the Montana Forest Action Plan to ensure efficient, effective and collaborative cross-boundary management across Montana's high priority landscapes.

Landowner Assistance

In 2020, 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. 120 acres were treated in 2020 and a second Western States WUI Grant was secured to expand on this work. The Kootenai Forests to Rivers Initiative (KFRI), through a partnership with American Forest Foundation, has transitioned from technical assistance to landowners, to providing cost-share financial assistance to reduce wildfire risk in this project landscape. More than 200 acres were brought under contract in 2020, with an additional 250 acres targeted for 2021. The KFRI partnership has grown to represent the DNRC, local county government, industrial timber land owners, the USFS and the NRCS.

Landscape Scale Restoration

Three projects wrapped up primary activities addressing watershed restoration initiatives focused on forest and water health improvements in three prominent river systems in Montana: the Gallatin River, the Big Hole River and the Blackfoot River. Project accomplishments: planted over 3,700 deciduous trees and shrubs on 773 acres, resulting in 20 miles of streambank and riparian forests improved for water quality benefits.

The Alvord Lake Community Forest restoration project reduced hazardous fuel conditions on 85 acres, enhanced wildlife habitat on 25 acres and combatted invasive weeds on 140 acres. Forest management will continue in 2021, and educational improvements will be made to inform recreators and outdoor education classes on forest ecosystems.

The Lolo Creek post-fire restoration project addresses watershed improvements in the John Creek tributary. 60 acres received sedimentation barrier treatments and native vegetation seeding. Over 7,000 ponderosa pine and western larch were planted on 55 acres and more than 400 acres were treated to occurrence and encroachment of invasive weeds.

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, led to strong goals and implementation strategies within the Forest Action Plan.

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 combines 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.

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