



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Montana 2025



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2024 Final
Community Forests and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$625,792
Forest Legacy	\$7,050,000
Forest Stewardship	\$144,931
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$550,000
State Fire Assistance	\$3,088,398
Urban and Community Forestry	\$342,848
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$523,832
Total	\$12,325,801

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 Fire Protection programs are integral to fulfilling this mission. The programs provide critical assistance to Montana landowners, communities, forest-based industries and others. These programs are funded, administered and implemented through partnerships between DNRC, USDA Forest Service and other private, non-profit and local government to manage for resilient forests, and build sustainable economies and communities.

Most of the state's 93 million acres are rural. Volunteer fire assistance and state fire assistance are essential to the protection of the rural communities in Montana. More than a quarter of the state is forested, and a quarter of those acres are privately owned with over 31,000 different ownerships. Guiding these landowners in managing their forests is the goal of cooperative forestry.

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 appropriated \$15 million above base funding for 2024.
- Increase acres treated for fuels reduction and forest health on state, private and federal lands through partnerships with the Forest Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, Farm Service Agency, MT Fish Wildlife and Parks, DNRC Trust Lands 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 technical, financial and logistical support.
- Promote Montana wood products and encourage the production of new and innovative wood products applications. Retain and bolster Montana's forest industry so 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.
- Actively promote the stewardship and growth of Montana's urban and community forests.

Provide trees and native plants for conservation plantings within the state of Montana.

- Provide high quality trees seedlings and native plants and seed for conservation plantings.
- Provide 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.
- Control 95% of the fires occurring on DNRC's direct protection at 10 acres or less because as fires grow larger and more complex, firefighting costs rise exponentially.
- Build and maintain the capacity of local governments so that local firefighters routinely succeed on initial attack and avoid the need for large-scale intervention by the DNRC or our federal partners.
- Across the state provide wildland fire service responders, leaders and incident management team members with training and leadership tools to be successful in today's wildland fire environment.
- Further develop our community preparedness and homeowner risk reduction, fire prevention and development of community wildfire prevention plans. We deliberately engage Montana's citizens to prepare themselves, their property and their communities for wildfire.
- Support and fund a prescribed fire council coordinator to facilitate the development of a statewide prescribed fire council in Montana.

Key Issues

- The environment in which the DNRC Fire Protection program operates continues to evolve. Fire seasons are longer, fire conditions have become more severe, fires are getting larger and "big" fire seasons occur more frequently.
- Our agency is working to educate Montana landowners, homeowners and the public about the concepts and benefits of fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes. The Forest Action Plan is our base platform to communicate these concepts and convince people to make the investments necessary to create fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes.
- Wildfires increasingly threaten communities, critical infrastructure, and the millions of acres of forests and grasslands across Montana. The demands posed by these current conditions and the now year-round threat of wildfire exceeds the current capacity of fire preparedness and response resources. The ability to adequately address community needs, proactively minimize risk, and prepare for the eventuality of wildfires is oftentimes over-extended.
- More than 85% of our partnering local government fire departments are staffed solely by volunteer firefighters providing fire protection to 50 million acres. 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, many people don't understand how much water urban trees need in Montana's semi-arid environment.
- 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.
- Montana has lost wood products milling infrastructure like most western states in the past 40 plus years resulting in less competitive prices for logs and higher transportation costs for public and private timber. We need to do everything we can to support our remaining mills and other wood processing facilities.
- DNRC needs to maintain a motivated, productive and engaged workforce. However, we face challenges when it comes to recruiting, developing and retaining the workforce we need.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2024 Accomplishments	Value
Population	1,084,225	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	6,646
Acres of Forest Land	26,311,251	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	3,775
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	5,808,429	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	2,676
Number of NIPF Landowners	31,064	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	372
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	1,698,462	State Fire Communities Assisted	32
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	2,658,952	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	1,500
Number of Rural Fire Departments	385	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	126	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	55
Forest Based Employment	6,530	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	537,385
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	2,600
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	14,422,960		

Program Highlights

Community Forests and Open Space

Montana did not have a new community forests and open space project in 2024.

In 2023 Missoula County was awarded \$600,000 to help fund the purchase of the 480-acre Marshall Mountain Community Park. The purchase was completed, and a forest management plan was completed also.

Conservation Education

Montana DNRC was pleased to support meaningful natural resource education experiences for youth through 9 projects across Montana. A few project highlights include:

Each year, funding supports the Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp where youth study natural resource science, economics, history, and social perspectives during a week-long summer youth camp. In between field sessions youth learn from guest speakers and hands-on activities. At the end of camp, students team up and apply lessons learned in a land-use-game where they manage a 3,800-acre ranch for 20 years.

Conservation Education funding also supported "Walk in the Woods & Timber Tours" in celebration of Montana's Forest Products Week where students & the public learned about the role of active forest management in improving forest health, reducing wildfire risk, & supporting our local economies through renewable wood products and jobs.

Additionally, funding supported a Project Learning Tree/Growing-up Wild/Project WET Workshop for 25 educators who gained hands-on knowledge of these curriculums and how to implement activities in their classrooms across Montana to share lessons on forests, water, wildlife, and more with students.

Cooperative Fire Protection

The Western States WUI Grant Program supports the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy by focusing on protecting communities within the WUI through outcome-driven, cross-boundary, innovative projects that align with priority areas identified in the Forest Action Plan and the Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment. WUI funds completed fuels treatment on 1,148 acres of non-federal land, completed 195 home/property assessments and supported 46 landowner educational initiatives. The program also supports Fire Adapted Community Coordinators to raise awareness, educate and encourage Montanans to take action to manage their risk, as well as update Community Wildfire

Protection Plans that are 10+ years old.

The Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program minimizes the potential for catastrophic losses to private property as the result of a wildland fire encroaching from adjacent public lands, which is accomplished through cost-share programs directly administered by DNRC personnel and in partnership with conservation organizations. The program treated 575 acres of non-federal land; completed 63 home/property assessments and supported 44 landowner educational initiatives.

The DNRC continues to provide technical assistance going into Round 3 of the USFS delivery of the Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG) program. These efforts included educating potential applicants (counties, communities, and other qualifying entities) about the program, and assisting with applicant access to the web portal. In early 2025 the state will apply on behalf of 3 implementation projects with local community partners. Additionally, 10 applications will be submitted directly to the program for a total of 13 CWDG applications in Montana.

Economic Action

The grant funds that DNRC awards from USDA State and Private Forestry and state of Montana sources not only help manage portions of the landscape, which would not be feasible otherwise, also help to maintain Montana's forest products and logging infrastructure. Maintaining this infrastructure significantly reduces the cost of forest management in the state because wood products of all types can be sold to offset costs. Despite the continued loss of some milling infrastructure, Montana's remaining mills are making investments in technology and increasing their production providing a functional and integrated industry across most of the state. In 2020 the forest products industry in Montana employed 6,973 people and contributed \$869 million to the state's economy.

We need programs to continue not only to reduce fuels, but also to help keep our struggling industry intact. Montana is perilously close to losing our infrastructure and looking like many other inland western states they don't have wood products infrastructure to help them treat acres.

Forest Action Plan Foresters/Coordinators

The supplemental Forest Action Plan implementation funding Montana DNRC received has been some of the most beneficial funding we have received outside of the base funding we get in the consolidated grant. We have used this money to bolster our state funding to implement the priority work outlined in our forest action plan, by hiring 1 position at each of our area offices focused on implementing the priority work. These positions have been instrumental in getting more acres treated and helping field staff to think beyond their own projects to get work done across boundaries on other ownerships.

Forest Health Protection

The Montana Forest Pest Management (FPM) Program provided identification, surveillance and management of forest pests on State, municipal, county and private lands throughout the Montana. More than 40 diagnostics and management recommendations were made via site visits, phone calls and email correspondence. The FPM Program assisted in teaching 3 professional level courses on insects and diseases, including 2 sessions specifically addressing root diseases. These sessions were attended by approximately 80 professional foresters, park managers, NRCS agents, and arborists. FPM staff also presented an introductory overview of forest insects and diseases at the Wildland Fire Training Academy, attended by well over 200 personnel. Public presentations, workshops and outreach events were attended by approximately 260 forest owners, natural resource managers and members of the public.

Field surveys were conducted along the Rocky Mountain Front to assess the impact of white pine blister rust on limber pine. Delimitation surveys were conducted to follow up on a spongy moth detection from the previous year, with no new specimens found. Field surveys were conducted for native insects including black pineleaf scale, secondary bark beetles of Douglas-fir, and wood borers. Western Bark Beetle Initiative funds supported projects on non-federal public lands managed by Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Lake County and City of Helena. Annual conditions were published in Forest Health Highlights and presented to diverse audiences.

Forest Legacy

Forest Legacy Project Montana Great Outdoors Phase 1 received final approval from the Montana Land Board in December 2024, FWP closed on the easement 2/7/2025.

FWP was awarded two Forest Legacy Program grants in 2024.

FY2024 funding supports Phase 2 of the Montana Great Outdoors Project and FY2025 funding supports the Stimson Timberland Legacy Project. These proposed projects would protect productive, working forestland in Flathead, Lincoln, Mineral, and Sanders counties. The conservation easements would prevent residential and commercial development protecting the land, water, wildlife, open space and scenic values of these incredible landscapes. The projects would ensure continued sustainable timber management guided by a Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks approved management plan, provide wood-product jobs, protect wildlife habitat and key landscape connectivity, and provide free, permanent, year-round public recreation access to extraordinary recreation land.

Forest Stewardship

Supported with FSP funding, Montana State University Extension Forestry provided 5 Forest Stewardship Workshops to a total of 149 participants (80 ownerships), resulting in 44 new Forest Stewardship Plans developed, and 20 plans monitored for continued commitment to forest stewardship practices. This represents more than 5,147 forested acres in Montana.

Participating landowners receive direct support from Stewardship Advisors during workshops (avg. ratio of 1 advisor for every 4 ownerships) and one-on-one consultation at their forested property as part of the Forest Management Plan development process. Advisors conduct workshop visits and annual plan monitoring. In 2024 advisors included: 3 MSU Extension staff, 8 DNRC Service Foresters, 1 NRCS Conservationists, 11 private consultants, and 8 industry foresters.

Landowner Assistance

In 2024 the DNRC provided technical assistance to 4,940 landowners and provided education to 1,706 individuals. This work was accomplished by DNRC service foresters, DNRC Forestry Assistance staff and through partnerships with the Montana Tree Farm Program, the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation and other federal, state and non-profit partners.

Through targeted and effective landowner outreach, the DNRC Stewardship Program continues to increase landowner engagement and participation through technical, education and financial assistance programs. One notable effort was the launch of www.mtforesinfo.org which is an education and resource website for Montana's forest landowners. The establishment of this web-based information portal were a collaboration of stakeholders with organizational missions to assist private landowners in Montana. The DNRC committed staff time to develop and launch the website and sustain the necessary capacity to continue ongoing maintenance and improvements. This includes creating or updating resources for modern relevancy, sharing news and success stories of active, sustainable private forest management, and creating content across a variety of mediums (print, audio, video, etc.) to effectively connect with private landowners.

Landscape Scale Restoration

Eight active LSR projects accomplished a variety of activities, including:

- erosion mitigation and post-wildfire restoration
- improving forest health and increasing resiliency to wildfire
- aspen restoration and wildlife habitat improvement, incl. streambank protections
- prescribed fire crew to support unit prep and Rx burns on state and private forest lands
- improve critical watershed and reduce hazardous fuels upstream of municipal source for surface water intake
- community protection through education and hazardous fuels reduction.

The DNRC has continued to increase its' support of prescribed fire initiatives, and LSR has been a strong conduit to achieving successful outcomes. Attaining "good fire" on the landscape is not an easy task; due to air quality guidelines, burn-windows are limited. Many agencies capitalize on open burning days, and this presents a personnel resource challenge to achieving prescribed fire outcomes across federal, state, and private ownership interests.

Through the creation of a seasonal Southwest Montana Prescribed Fire Crew, 1,153 acres were prepared

for out-year burn units. The crew completed 564 acres of burning in 2024. Funding for this initiative has created a series of small, but incredibly significant steps forward towards a more active prescribed fire program in Montana.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program has significantly expanded its' work across the state especially in rural communities bolstered by increased capacity and funding from the USFS State, Private and Tribal Forestry Organization.

The UCF Program launched a funding opportunity targeting Tribal Nations, allocating \$1M for multi-year projects, with 7 project concepts received in the first cycle each requesting around \$150,000 each. This is currently on hold due to the funding freeze.

UCF Program also completed the review process and selected 11 projects that take place entirely within low-income communities that focus on tree planting, hazardous tree removal and replacement, urban forestry program implementation, urban canopy increase, climate adaptation, community engagement and trainings. A portion of these projects have been completed before the funding freeze.

The annual Program Development Grant selected 7 communities to implement projects focused on inventory updates, expansion of urban forestry profession, tree care maintenance, and public education.

Helena's UCF-Wildland-Urban Interface report was drafted in 2023 and continued through 2024. The study aims to explore the impact of urban forestry on wildfire risk in the Helena area.

Other noteworthy highlights:

- A threefold increase in outreach and engagement, since the addition of two new UCF foresters.
- Recognition of 44 Tree City USA designations and two Tree Campus USA designations, including the Blackfeet Nation's historic recognition as the first-ever Tree City of the World.
- 4 tree inventories were updated, and 4 new inventories were completed for a total of 69 in the state.
- Active participation in conferences addressing the Emerald Ash Borer threat in Montana.
- Collaboration with the DNRC Nursery to maintain a reliable source of high-quality trees and locally sourced seeds for program initiatives.

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