



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet Montana 2024



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2023 Estimate
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$610,000
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$723,670
Forest Legacy	\$6,050,000
Forest Stewardship	\$132,787
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$661,720
State Fire Assistance	\$2,839,094
Urban and Community Forestry	\$363,872
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$521,776
Total	\$11,902,919

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 appropriated \$15 million above base funding for 2023, and the Forest Service provided an additional \$728,000 in BIL funding.
- 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 financial, technical 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 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, firefighting costs rise exponentially.
- Modernize the State/County Coop (County Coop) Fire Protection arrangement to include resources required to achieve program goals and objectives reflecting strategic direction and priorities to better support cooperative fire protection across in Montana.
- Across the state provide mid and upper-level 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 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.
- 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.
- In addition to increasingly severe fire conditions, Montana has a wildland-urban interface (WUI) 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 in the WUI requires more fire prevention, mitigation, community preparedness and fire suppression resources to enable the DNRC to redeem its responsibilities.
- 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. The Forest Service has increased base funding for Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) and the DNRC has hired two dedicated UCF Service Foresters to support small and medium-sized communities with their needs.
- Educating the public about best management practices for tree care continues to be a challenge. Many people don't understand how much water urban trees need in our semi-arid climate.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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). However, not only is the County Coop Program based on a 50-year-old model, it faces significant challenges, including a severely declining volunteer workforce. DNRC is in the process of adding a few key staff to strengthen the program.

- We need an interagency approach to improve efficiency, enable more cost-effective services to Montana taxpayers and strengthen 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.
- Woodborers are generally considered secondary beetles that attack dead and dying trees but in recent years, there's been a dramatic uptick in attacks on seemingly healthy trees. Although these trees may appear healthy, they've most likely been stressed by extended drought and extreme heat events. The "Heat Dome" of 2021 was a particularly severe period of high temperatures that caused irreversible tree damage; thus the woodborers have opportunistically targeted these weakened trees.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2023 Accomplishments	Value
Population	1,084,225	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	3,756
Acres of Forest Land	26,311,251	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	7,204
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	5,808,429	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	4,871
Number of NIPF Landowners	31,064	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	384
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	1,698,462	State Fire Communities Assisted	66
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	2,658,952	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	1,750
Number of Rural Fire Departments	385	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	0
Cities and Towns	126	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	52
Forest Based Employment	6,530	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	534,284
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	2,671
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	14,422,960		

Program Highlights

Community Forestry and Open Space

In 2023 Missoula County was awarded \$600,000 to help fund the purchase of the 480 acre Marshall Mountain Community Park and Montana DNRC was awarded \$10,000 to provide technical assistance in the form of a forest management plan. The grant will go toward the \$3.8 million total purchase price of the 480-acre former ski hill near East Missoula, which the County and City of Missoula are working in partnership to secure permanent public access to. County and City staff are leveraging in-kind donations, grants and private donations to count toward the purchase price. City and County citizen advisory boards have each recommended the use of \$1 million of open space bond funding, for a total of \$2 million, to support the acquisition. Taken together, these funding sources cover most of the acquisition cost of the 460-acre park. This opportunity is possible thanks to the generosity of the three private landowners – Izzy Dog LLC, Five Valleys Land Trust and The Conservation Fund – each of which currently own separate 160-acre parcels.

"Securing permanent public access to Marshall Mountain would ensure that our communities, both urban and rural, can explore the outdoors by hiking, biking or birdwatching while offering an amazing location for community gathering, as well as kids camps and other youth programming," said Missoula County Commissioner Dave Strohmaier. "The area reflects community values like access to public lands for all users while expanding recreational opportunities, conserving open space and protecting wildlife habitat and large landscape connectivity."

Conservation Education

Montana DNRC was pleased to financially support meaningful natural resource education experiences for youth through 8 projects across Montana. A few project highlights are in the below section.

Funding was provided to Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp where youth studied natural resources science, economics, history, and social perspectives in an outdoor classroom. In between field sessions youth participate in specialty programs such as presentations by guest speakers, hands-on learning-through-discovery, and campfires. Conservation Education funding also supported "Walk in the Woods & Timber Tour" field trips during Montana's Forest Products Week where students & the public learned about the role of active forest management in improving forest health, sequestering carbon, reducing wildfire risk, & supporting our local economies through renewable wood products and jobs. Additionally, funding supported Missoula Department of Ecology & Extension in hosting Missoula 5th grade students in learning about native plants, invasive species, and land stewardship through a field trip to a local recreation area where the students went on a guided hike, identified plants, and pulled weeds.

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 Montana Wildfire Risk Assessment. WUI funds completed fuels treatment on 1,800 acres of non-federal land, completed 369 home/property assessments and supported 73 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 176 acres of non-federal land; completed 31 home/property assessments; supported 7 landowner educational initiatives.

The DNRC provided technical assistance to the USFS for the rollout 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. The state acted as the applicant on behalf of 4 projects with local community partners. Additionally, 7 applications were submitted directly to the program for a total of 11 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 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.

Forest Health Protection

The Forest Pest Management (FPM) Program provided identification, surveillance and management of forest pests on State, municipal, county and private lands throughout the state. 100 diagnostics and management recommendations were made via site visits, phone calls and email correspondence. 194 professional foresters, park managers, NRCS agents, arborists, seasonal fire personnel, and private landowners were trained to identify and manage forest insects and diseases. Field surveys were conducted for invasive pests including balsam woolly adelgid and spongy moth. Field surveys were conducted for native insects including black pineleaf scale, larch engraver beetles, and wood borers. Western Bark Beetle Initiative funds supported projects on non-federal public lands managed by Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Trust Lands, Sanders County, and City of Helena. Annual conditions were published in Forest Health Highlights.

Forest Legacy

Montana's Forest Legacy Program is administered by Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks in consultation with the Montana Forest Action Committee, which serves an advisory role to recommend projects for

submission and to provide feedback on applications. FY22 funding supports the Montana Great Outdoors Project and FY23 funding supports the first phase of the Upper Thompson Connectivity Project. Both proposed projects would protect productive, working forestland in Thompson Falls, Sanders and Flathead 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

DNRC's partnership with Montana State University Extension Forestry provided 5 Forest Stewardship Workshops to a total of 151 participants (92 ownerships), resulting in 69 new Forest Stewardship Plans developed and 27 plans monitored for continued commitment to forest stewardship practices. This represents more than 7,904 forested acres in Montana.

Landowner Assistance

The DNRC provided technical or educational assistance to 4641 landowners. 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 numerous other federal, state and non-profit partners.

Through targeted and effective landowner outreach, the DNRC Stewardship Program continues to increase landowner engagement and participation in technical, educational and financial assistance programs.

Technical assistance was provided to 119 non-industrial private forest owners, and 32 forest management plans were developed through a partnership with the Natural Resource Conservation Service to qualify landowners to receive assistance through EQIP. This work was accomplished by DNRC Service Foresters and contractors.

Landscape Scale Restoration

Landscape Scale Restoration

The DNRC has eleven active Landscape Scale Restoration projects accomplishing a variety of activities, including: erosion mitigation and post-wildfire restoration, improving forest health and increasing resiliency to wildfire, improving wildlife habitat, tree canopy establishment and related benefits in Montana's tribal communities, forest improvements and public education in a community forest and community protection through education and hazardous fuels reduction. These projects are administering \$2.7M of State & Private Forestry investments and leveraging an additional \$2.9M of match and non-match contributions to complete more than 5,100 acres of forest management treatments and 5+ miles of stream bank and adjacent riparian forest restoration.

Urban and Community Forestry

This year in UCF has been marked by various challenges, and yet significant progress. The final state Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) allocations impacted the state program and affected partnerships. With the support of IRA funds, UCF is poised to enter a new era of growth and impact in the years to come.

From the incoming \$1.2M IRA state allocation, funding will focus on Strengthening Tribal Forestry Programs to build and strengthen tribal relationships.

One of the major accomplishments of 2023 was the successful completion of the LSR Trees for Tribal Communities project. Just one of the highlights included experimental methods in using culturally significant trees in land use types ranging from riparian to hardscape that produced valuable insight into designing planting projects.

The UCF-WUI (Urban and Community Forestry-Wildland-Urban Interface) Helena report was drafted in 2023. The study aims to explore the impact of urban forestry on wildfire risk in the Helena area.

Other noteworthy highlights:

- MT UCF's program tripled its capacity this year with the addition of 2 new UCF dedicated foresters.

-A total of 42 Tree City USAs and 3 new Tree Campus USAs were recognized, despite challenges with the launch of a

new online portal for certification. Of particular note is Tree City of the World recognition for the Blackfeet Nation, the first of its kind in the country.

-Tree inventories were maintained or updated, and 2 new inventories were performed to reach a total of 65.

-Educational workshops were conducted with local partners and schools including the Tree Board Retreat in Choteau.

-UCF is working with the DNRC Nursery to provide a reliable source of high-quality trees for program initiatives.

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