



State and Private Forestry Fact Sheet

Montana 2019



Investment in State's Cooperative Programs

Program	FY 2018 Final
Community Forestry and Open Space	\$0
Cooperative Lands - Forest Health Management	\$425,727
Forest Legacy	\$4,000,000
Forest Stewardship	\$184,600
Landscape Scale Restoration	\$618,000
State Fire Assistance	\$3,186,630
Urban and Community Forestry	\$233,900
Volunteer Fire Assistance	\$389,549
Total	\$9,038,406

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 promote the health and productivity of Montana's forests and rural economies.

Program Goals

- Work with partners 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.
- Increase acres treated for fuels reduction and forest restoration on private and federal lands through partnerships with the Forest Service 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 identify and manage 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 just beginning to educate Montana landowners and homeowners about the fire adapted communities and resilient landscapes concepts. Doing so will prove challenging as multiple agencies and organizations are active in communicating about these concepts, but are not yet sending unified messages.
- 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.
- 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.
- Educating the public about best management practices for tree care continues to be a challenge. For example, tree topping is a common issue.
- 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.

Forest Facts and Accomplishments

Selected Facts	Value	FY 2018 Accomplishments	Value
Population	989,415	Landowners Receiving Educational or Technical Assistance	7,532
Acres of Forest Land	25,883,606	Acres Covered by New or Revised Forest Stewardship Plans	3,812
Acres of Nonindustrial Private Forest Land	5,430,000	Acres in Important Forest Resource Areas Covered by New or Revised Stewardship Plans	2,065
Number of NIPF Landowners	40,000	Volunteer Fire Departments Assisted	355
Acres of Federal Land Under State Fire Protection	1,698,462	State Fire Communities Assisted	95
Acres of Private Land Under State Fire Protection	2,658,952	Coop Forest Health Acres Protected	21,250
Number of Rural Fire Departments	385	Forest Legacy Project Acquisitions	7,018
Cities and Towns	127	Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	48
Forest Based Employment	6,530	Population Living in Communities Provided Urban Forestry Program Assistance	469,947
Economic Impact of Forestry (by rank)	3	Urban Forestry Volunteer Assistance	9,364
State Forestry Budget (All Sources)	14,756,704		

Program Highlights

Community Forestry and Open Space

Montana had no Community Forestry and Open Space applications in FY 2018. Alvord Lake Community Forest (a FY 2016 CFOS project) was sub-awarded \$120,000 under the 2018 LSR grant program for purposes of restoration on its 140 acres using prescribed fire, thinning, slash disposal and weed treatment.

Conservation Education

Conservation Education funds supported the following activities in Montana in FY2018:

- Delivered 10 workshops to train 133 educators in use of the Project Learning Tree Program.

- Conservation educators put skills to practice at the Montana Natural Resources Youth Camp, attended by 24 youth (ages 14 to 17) in July 2018.
- Provided training in Tools for Engaging Landowners Effectively to 80 conservation professionals.

Cooperative Fire Protection

Volunteer Fire Assistance Program (VFA) provided local government fire entities with \$303,606 in grant funds. 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 Health Management Program continued to provide identification, surveillance and management of forest pests on State, municipal, county and private lands throughout the state. An intensive assessment of limber pine health was conducted along the Rocky Mountain Front with a primary focus on the impacts of white pine blister rust, bark beetles and altered fire cycles. Permanent plots were installed to assess the impacts of balsam woolly adelgid on true fir ecosystems in Montana.

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 2018, Phase 1 of the Whitefish Lake Watershed project, also known as the Lazy Creek Conservation Easement, was finalized with a contribution of \$7 million from the Forest Legacy Program. An update of the Lazy Creek Multi-Resource Management Plan was also completed and approved to finalize Phase 2 of the same project, which will be accomplished in FY 2019. Together, 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 will also add over 6,000 acres to the DNRC's Stillwater State Forest, increasing potential revenue for Montana's trust lands beneficiaries.

Forest Stewardship

In 2018, Montana's Stewardship Program provided 5 Forest Stewardship workshops with a total of 139 participants, resulting in 53 Stewardship plans; developed 10 plans with NRCS EQIP; furnished technical assistance to 1,190 landowners; and provided education to 6,342 individuals. Currently, the State has 65,336 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 a stewardship specialist, and through partnerships with Montana State University Extension Forestry, the Montana Tree Farm Program, the Montana Forest Stewardship Foundation and numerous other federal, state and non-profit partners.

Forests in Focus 2.0

In the fall of 2018, Governor Steve Bullock launched Forests in Focus 2.0. Forests in Focus 2.0 charts a course for key stakeholders to collaboratively address our most pressing needs in forest health and wildfire risk across Montana. The timing of Montana's State Forest Action Plan revision offers a unique opportunity for the state to work with all partners to respond to the USFS Shared Stewardship Strategy, including using new tools and technologies to prioritize outcome-based investments. The 2020 Forest Action Plan will serve as Montana's authoritative plan for addressing forest health and wildland fire risk issues across all forested lands in the state.

Under Forests in Focus 2.0, DNRC will work to unite federal, state, local and tribal governments; industry partners; conservation organizations; collaborative and watershed groups; and other relevant partners around clear goals. Together, we will advance a common mission and strengthen our shared stewardship

of Montana's forests by developing a plan of work that addresses capacity and implementation needs and unleashes the creativity of local and regional team members.

One of the components of the Forest Action Plan will be a Statewide Forest Resource Strategy. This strategy will outline a 10-year plan of work to address forest health and wildland fire risk in priority areas identified in the Statewide Assessment of Forest Resources. The strategy will also recommend tools and authorities to be utilized by agencies to carry out the priority work, identify resources necessary to carry out the plan and offer administrative or legislative changes needed to accomplish mutual goals identified in the plan. The strategy will also outline a robust communication initiative to educate Montana's citizens about all components of the Forest Action Plan.

Landowner Assistance

In 2018, in addition to carrying on the Golden Crown Stewardship Initiative in Cascade and Northern Lewis and Clark County, the DNRC launched a second targeted marketing strategy in partnership with the American Forest Foundation to engage landowners in Lincoln County. Fourteen hundred landowners in Lincoln County were reached through direct mail and social media campaigns, with a response rate approaching 10%. In FY 2019, 150 will receive technical assistance from a consulting forester or peer forest landowner; these will in turn be put in the pipeline for assistance with commercial harvest or cost-share for fuels reduction.

Landscape Scale Restoration

Completion of 199 acres of timber harvest to reduce conifer encroachment and improve conditions on elk winter range on the Blackfoot-Clearwater Wildlife Management Area was completed under an LSR grant awarded in FY 2018. Approximately 2,300 tons of forest products from the project were routed local mills and other utilization outlets.

Urban and Community Forestry

The Montana Urban & Community Forestry (UCF) program's work focused on education, both internally and externally. The UCF program hosted a Tree Board Retreat in Lewistown, MT which brought people from across the state to share information and ideas on small town efforts with urban and community forestry. The UCF Program continues to work with Montana's tribal communities supporting several projects. The UCF program maintained a strong relationship with its advisory council, Montana Urban and Community Forestry Association, in offering statewide training opportunities for tree care and urban forestry professionals. The community of Anaconda hosted the statewide Arbor Day celebration, with over 300 students and members of the public in attendance. Montana UCF added new inventories to the statewide urban forestry database, which now has 64 community inventories. The statewide database has proven invaluable for use in the program and for assisting communities in planning and management.

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