

Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership: A Monitoring Report January 2003

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, a Cooperative Agreement between the US Forest Service (Coconino National Forest, Rocky Mountain Research Station, USDA Forest Products Lab) and non-profit Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, Inc., was formed following the wildfire season of 1996. The Partnership is guided by three primary goals:

- 1) Restore the natural ecosystem functions—within the range of natural variability—of the ponderosa pine forests in Flagstaff's Urban Wildland Interface;
- 2) Manage forest fuels within the Urban Wildland Interface to reduce the risk of catastrophic fire;
- 3) Research, test, develop, and demonstrate key, ecological, economic, and social dimensions of restoration efforts.

Data collection and project planning for the Partnership began in 1998, with limited on-the-ground project work beginning November 1998. Due to administrative appeals and litigation, the Partnership was delayed in implementing ecological restoration work on its first landscape-scale project from May 5, 1999 to January 3, 2001. In 1999 the Partnership was selected as a Stewardship Contracting Pilot Project and recognized as a Reinvention Laboratory by Vice-President Gore in 1999.

As determined by the 25-member Partnership Advisory Board, the accomplishments to-date of the Partnership are categorized into the following groups: 1) Acres Thinned; 2) Acres Burned; 3) Acres Managed for Restoration; 4) Acres Analyzed; 5) Number of Research Studies. All accomplishments listed are determined from the Partnership's 1996 inception and are found within the Partnership's designated project boundary, approximating the Flagstaff Wildland/Urban Interface.

Acres Thinned

Thinning of trees within the urban interface is necessary to reduce unnaturally high fuel loads that occur around Flagstaff due to nearly a century of fire suppression. Thinning consists of 14 different treatment types. To date, there have been approximately 1,100 acres thinned on Forest Service lands, with approximately another 900 acres under contract to thin. On City of Flagstaff and Arizona State lands, both of which are formal Partners, approximately another 4,230 acres have been thinned to date.



Acres Burned

The ponderosa pine forests of Northern Arizona historically burned with great frequency, usually anywhere from every 3-15 years. These fires helped keep natural fuel loads down, and also recycled nutrients into the soil very efficiently. The burns prescribed within the urban interface today are designed to mimic natural fires' role in the ecosystem. To date, approximately 750 acres have been broadcast burned on Forest Service land, with many other acres of slash pile burning accomplished. On City and State lands, approximately 2,450 acres have been broadcast burned to date.



Acres Managed for Restoration

The term restoration does not just mean thinning and burning. It also includes the management of roads and trails, managing other recreation desires, and meeting the needs of wildlife. Currently, approximately 7,000 acres are being actively managed for restoration efforts. This includes the thinning and burning stated above, as well as wildlife cover deferrals, road closures and obliterations on approximately 4 miles of roads, meadow restoration at Chimney Springs meadow, protection and restoration work at Chimney Springs, and clean up and designation of camping spots along the popular Freidlein Prairie Road.

Acres Analyzed

Six environmental analyses have been completed to date: Fort Valley Demo, Fort Valley Ecosystem Restoration Project, Elden and Arboretum Fuels Reduction Projects, Airport Fuels Reduction Project (though cancelled due to a land swap), and the recently-completed Kachina Village Forest Health Project. Analyses completed, but not yet implemented on the ground, represent approximately 11,000 acres of additional potential ecological restoration treatments, over approximately 24,000 acres of area analyzed. The Partnership is also in the midst of planning the 16,000-acre Woody Ridge Project, with a Draft EIS due in late 2003.

Number of Research Studies

At present, there are over 70 different research processes underway within the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership and its project boundary. The studies include the effects of different treatments on fire intensity, soils, wildlife, and vegetation. Also being studied are the economics of treatments, as well as the social components of forest restoration. All applicable research projects are accounted for in the Partnership's *Research Reference Guide, 2nd Edition* (January 2003). For more information about the Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership, please visit our website at gffp.org.