



Forest Service  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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WILDFIRE CRISIS

MAKING A  
DIFFERENCE

# A HISTORIC YEAR

Expanding the Pace and Scale of Wildfire Risk  
Reduction and Forest Health Treatments

Pinyon, juniper, and scrub oak are common forest cover in the semi-arid ecosystems of the Dixie National Forest in southwestern Utah. The pinyon-juniper woodlands covering the hill in the background have been thinned in a fuels reduction treatment to reduce wildfire severity. USDA Forest Service photo by Lindsey Winkel.

# A HISTORIC YEAR

In January 2022, we—the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service—announced the [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#). This strategy provided a vision for what it will take to meaningfully change how people, communities, and natural resources experience risk from wildfire.

We made progress in implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy during the 2023 fiscal year. This was made possible due to the dedication of our employees and partners, as well as the historic investments Congress made through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act.

In January 2023, we announced the addition of [11 new Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes](#) to the [initial 10 landscapes](#).

We have now treated over 1 million acres across the 21 landscapes since the rollout of the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

This includes 765,450 acres treated in fiscal year 2023 alone as we continued to increase the pace and scale of our work. The diligent work of the agency and its partners to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest health in these landscapes has begun to reduce wildfire risk for hundreds of communities, critical infrastructure such as transmission lines, and crucial watersheds that supply drinking water.

These successes fit into the broader efforts of the agency to reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health across the Nation. In 2023, we—along with partners, communities, and Tribes—treated more than 4.3 million acres of hazardous fuels, including nearly 2 million acres of prescribed burning. Both of these are record highs in our 119-year history and more than 1 million acres accomplished than the previous year.





Wildland firefighters conducted prescribed burns on the Stanislaus National Forest in California. These burns were part of a larger agency effort to apply an updated management process for prescribed fire that mimics the established processes for fighting wildland fires. USDA Forest Service photo.

# DOING BUSINESS DIFFERENTLY

The wildfire crisis cannot be confronted with business as usual. Throughout fiscal year 2023, we changed our way of doing business to better meet the challenge posed by this crisis.

## INCREASING CAPACITY

Increasing the capacity of the agency and our partners is crucial to expanding the pace and scale of wildfire risk reduction and forest health treatments.

We are focusing heavily on hiring, recruitment, and retention to bolster our internal capacity. Thanks to these efforts, permanent hiring has outpaced attrition. This past fiscal year, we filled a net 2,564 positions covering a range of key roles and responsibilities.

We expanded our circle of partners and invested in their capacity. This past fiscal year, we worked alongside 148 unique partners in the landscapes. This includes 21 new relationships with partners we have not worked with before.

Early in 2023, we built on long-standing relationships with several of our partners by establishing a series of large, national-level agreements. These agreements will allow us to implement projects quickly and efficiently with these keystone partners across the 21 landscapes and other at-risk lands managed by the Forest Service (National Forest System lands).

Tribes play a critical role in implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. In February 2023, we released the [“Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships: A USDA Forest Service Action Plan.”](#) This action plan outlines steps the agency will take to advance Tribal consultation and strengthen nation-to-nation

relationships with federally recognized Tribes. It provides an important foundation for how we collaborate with Tribes to reduce wildfire risk and restore forest health.

As we expand cooperative stewardship and management opportunities with Tribes, we recognize it will be crucial to bolster Tribal capacity. In April 2022, we partnered with the Intertribal Timber Council to host a national roundtable discussion with Tribes to ensure that their voices were part of framing, developing, and implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. This discussion led to the [Intertribal Workforce Capacity and Development Dialogue Series](#), which took place between February and April 2023. Building on the best practices highlighted for the national roundtable, this virtual series was a thorough exploration of the challenges and opportunities associated with funding workforce development, including assessing capacity, recruiting and retaining talent, and policy constraints.

“The Nature Conservancy [TNC] commends the Forest Service for fully committing to ‘do business differently’ when it comes to wildfire resilience initiatives. By prioritizing the landscapes most in need—and by employing the best science-based, collaborative forest stewardship principles—the agency and its partners are leading the way in mitigating wildfire risk across the West. TNC’s new partnership with the Forest Service to scale up the prescribed fire workforce is just one example of the ‘all-of-society’ approaches we need to expedite forest health projects, overcome administrative and jurisdictional barriers, and ensure compliance with environmental laws and policies.”

**Whitney Forman-Cook**  
Senior Policy Advisor, Forests and Fire  
The Nature Conservancy

Members of the San Carlos Apache Fire Module and the Reserve Treaty Rights Lands crew from the San Carlos Apache Tribe trim tree stumps. This was part of phase one of the Highway Tanks Tribal Forest Protection Act collaborative fuel reduction project on the Globe Ranger District and neighboring San Carlos Apache Indian ancestral land in Arizona. USDA Forest Service photo by Amanda Oliver.



## INCREASING PACE & SCALE

The Wildfire Crisis Strategy calls for dramatically increasing the pace and scale of forest health treatments across the West. To achieve this, we are using every tool and authority available and making innovative changes to existing systems and processes.

To expedite projects and ensure work is happening in the places where it is needed most, we created a strategic framework that will allow us to develop fuel treatment plans quickly and more collaboratively with partners and stakeholders while still maintaining compliance with environmental laws and policies. We also began a formal, holistic portfolio and project management approach to the Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes. This enables consistent planning and work management across landscapes.

In June 2023, we released our new [National Prescribed Fire Resource Mobilization Strategy](#). It included recommendations to align prescribed fire implementation, support, and coordination across the agency. It used fire suppression concepts, processes, and procedures to supplement and prioritize prescribed fire on the landscapes. It also outlined a scalable management organization, in the form of regional prescribed fire implementation teams, sized to match the scope of projects. We piloted this mobilization strategy in California on the Stanislaus Landscape Project with great success, achieving years' worth of work in just a 3-week period. The strategy has since been refined and its use expanded.

We have been using the emergency authorities ([Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), Section 40807, Emergency actions) granted by Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack through his emergency determination. These emergency authorities have enabled us to accelerate planning, consultation, contracting, hiring, and project implementation within the high-risk fireheds identified in the Wildfire Crisis Strategy. In fiscal year 2023, we approved 39 fuels reduction projects in the high-risk fireheds. Twenty-one of these approved projects were within the landscapes, and they are slated to treat 1,040,470 acres in the coming years. We will continue using these emergency authorities in fiscal year 2024.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law established a new categorical exclusion for fuel breaks. As of the end of fiscal year 2023, we have 50 projects using this categorical exclusion authority that will treat 40,237 acres. These fuel break projects will help reduce wildfire risk to communities and critical infrastructure.

We continued expanding the development and use of potential operational delineations (PODs). PODs provide a formal process to preplan for inevitable wildfires using a risk management approach. As of September, 70 PODs assessments have been completed, 3 are in the process, and 11 more are scheduled for fiscal year 2024.

There are several legal authorities available to the agency for working with Tribes. To ensure we are making the most of these varied authorities, we performed an inventory and review of these legal mechanisms to see how we can best support Tribal co-stewardship and partnerships. We also hosted joint meetings with our staff and Tribes to better understand Tribal Forest Protection Act provisions and more effectively leverage this act to support forest restoration projects.

In addition, long-standing programs like the [Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program](#) and the [Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership](#) also contributed to forest health restoration efforts in and around the Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes. Such programs provide additional funding sources and opportunities to increase the pace and scale of work beyond those provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, and regular appropriations.

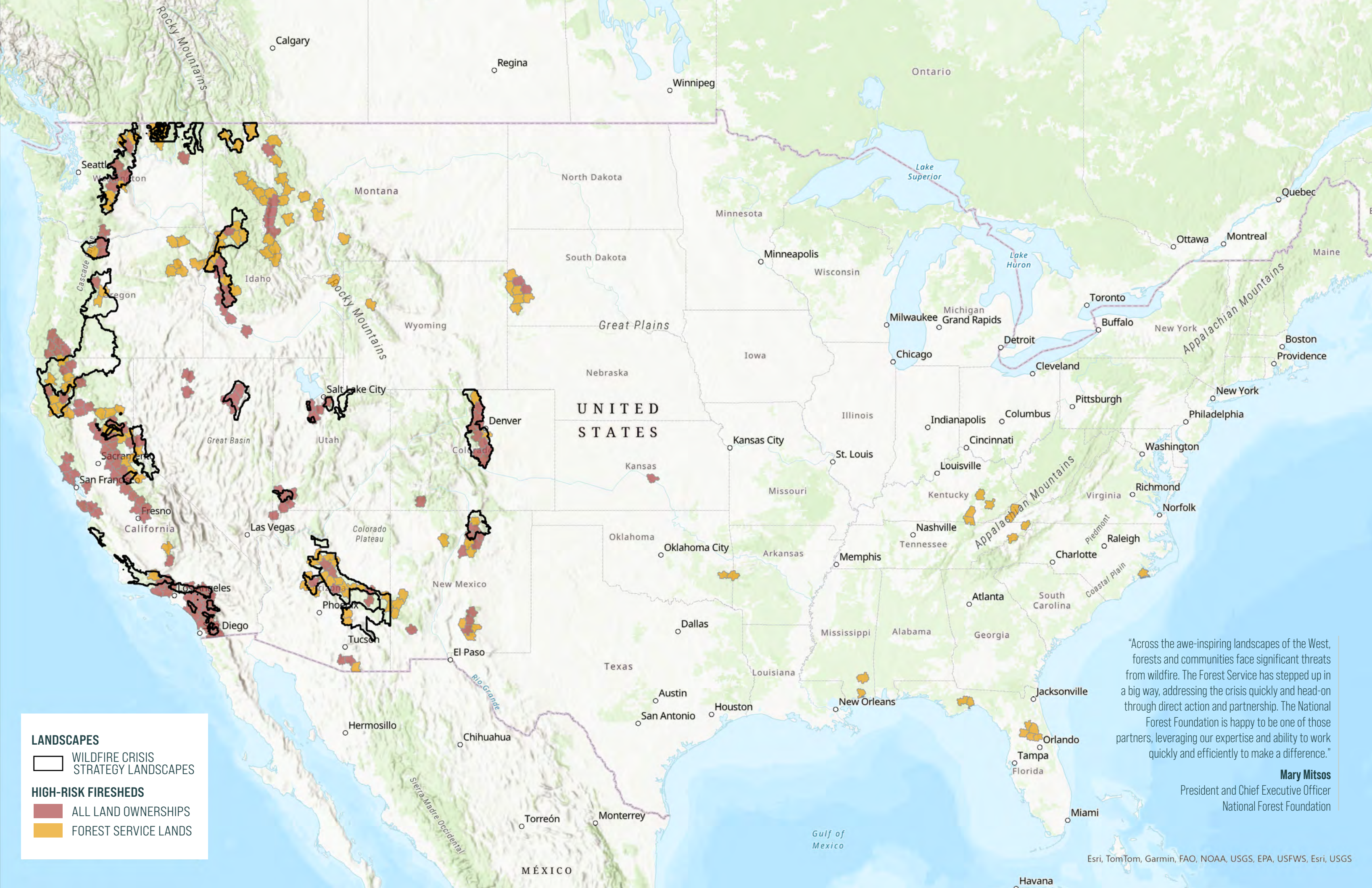
Throughout fiscal year 2023, we invested heavily in grant programs aimed at enabling wildfire risk reduction efforts across lands of all jurisdictions.

In March, we invested \$197 million in 99 projects through the [Community Wildfire Defense Grant Program](#). Using funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, this grant program helps communities, Tribes, nonprofit organizations, State forestry agencies, and Alaska Native corporations plan for and reduce wildfire risks.

In April, we invested \$33.7 million in Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds in projects to strengthen the wood products economy and promote sustainable forest management. This included \$29 million to support wood processing facilities and \$4.7 million to fund temporary water crossings for skidders and other heavy forestry equipment.

In June, we invested more than \$43 million in 123 projects through the [Community Wood Grant Program](#) and [Wood Innovations Grant Program](#). This investment was made possible in part by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. Both the Community Wood grants and Wood Innovations grants promote innovation in wood products and renewable wood energy economies.

Collectively, these investments will help give communities the resources they need to plan for and reduce wildfire risk while facilitating innovation both internally and with the wood products industry to match the pace and scale needed for reducing hazardous fuels.



**LANDSCAPES**

WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY LANDSCAPES

**HIGH-RISK FIRESHEDS**

ALL LAND OWNERSHIPS

FOREST SERVICE LANDS

“Across the awe-inspiring landscapes of the West, forests and communities face significant threats from wildfire. The Forest Service has stepped up in a big way, addressing the crisis quickly and head-on through direct action and partnership. The National Forest Foundation is happy to be one of those partners, leveraging our expertise and ability to work quickly and efficiently to make a difference.”

**Mary Mitsos**  
 President and Chief Executive Officer  
 National Forest Foundation

# LANDSCAPE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

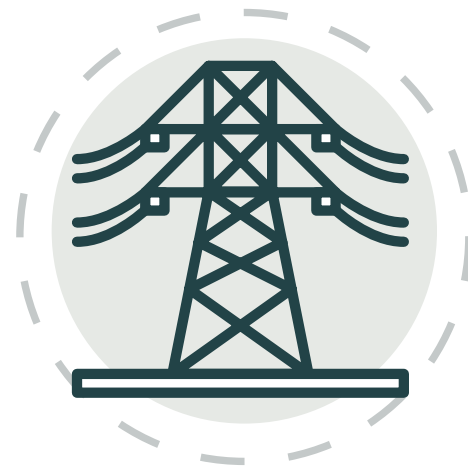
The 21 Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes span 135 high-risk fireheds across 10 States in the West. These landscapes represent some of the areas with the highest wildfire risk and most vulnerable communities and critical infrastructure. Each landscape includes a mix of land jurisdictions, including National Forest System lands, other Federal lands, Tribal lands, State lands, municipal lands, and privately owned lands.

Although our landscape investments are multijurisdictional, the following updates include accomplishments on National Forest System lands only.



## AT-RISK COMMUNITIES

At-risk communities as identified by wildfirerisk.org.



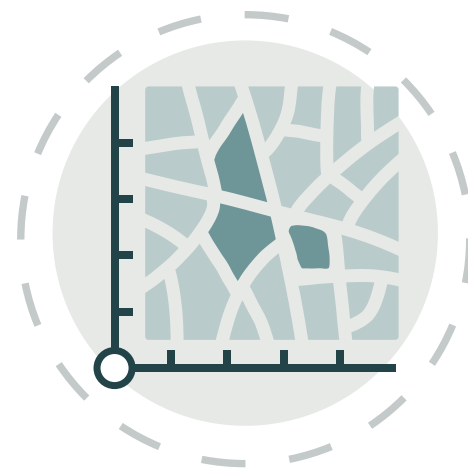
## MILES OF TRANSMISSION LINES

Transmission lines are lines 345 volts or over from datasets managed by U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Homeland Infrastructure Foundation-Level Data (HIFLD).



## NUMBER OF WATERSHEDS

Municipal supply watersheds data from the USDA Forest Service Southern Research Station.



## ACRES TREATED

Acreage is for fiscal year 2023 only; some landscapes also had work completed in the prior fiscal year.

## LANDSCAPE

LANDSCAPE					
Four Forest Restoration Initiative	AZ	58	572	124	131,682
Greater Prescott Area Wildfire Protection and Restoration	AZ	13	40	23	13,762
San Carlos Apache Tribal Forest Protection	AZ	20	129	27	14,780
Klamath River Basin	CA, OR	22	362	160	164,642
North Yuba	CA	6	0	29	21,483
Plumas Community Protection	CA	31	0	52	49,496
Sierra and Elko Fronts	CA, NV	54	51	72	25,085
Southern California Fireshed Risk Reduction Strategy	CA	75	220	231	33,370
Stanislaus	CA	18	0	20	17,967
Trinity Forest Health and Fire-Resilient Rural Communities	CA	15	0	48	16,175
Colorado Front Range	CO	80	9	155	19,644
Nez Perce-Clearwater-Lower Salmon	ID	4	0	45	8,518
Kootenai Complex	ID, MT	14	0	42	17,265
Southwest Idaho	ID	10	0	62	73,910
Enchanted Circle	NM	20	6	38	5,188
Central Oregon	OR	15	228	53	50,836
Mount Hood Forest Health and Fire-Resilient Communities	OR	16	138	40	15,907
Pine Valley	UT	7	72	18	9,632
Wasatch	UT	31	3	69	15,866
Central Washington Initiative	WA	22	393	186	33,849
Colville Northeast Washington Vision	WA	6	0	140	26,393

Deputy Forest Supervisor Kurt Davis on the Coronado National Forest shakes hands with Chairman Rambler from the San Carlos Apache Tribe after the signing of the historic San Carlos Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) on August 1, 2023. This agreement allows the San Carlos Apache Tribe to collaborate on cross-boundary landscape-scale restoration projects in the Apache-Sitgreaves, Coronado, and Tonto National Forests and adjacent Tribal ancestral lands. USDA Forest Service photo.

# CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

While the 2023 fiscal year was marked by success, there were also challenges that we and our partners faced. We are looking for the opportunities to overcome these challenges when and where possible.

Inflation and a high demand for contractors led to increased project costs and implementation times. In some cases, bids received on contracts were double the projected estimated cost. Uncooperative weather constrained the ability to implement some project work as well. As we continue to use the new National Prescribed Fire Mobilization Strategy, we will capitalize on potential burn windows by being more responsive with the resources available nationwide.

The transportation costs and lack of market potential associated with small-diameter wood and noncommercial trees continue to pose a significant challenge in efforts to reduce hazardous fuels. We are collaborating with the wood products industry and other partners to find innovative solutions to this challenge. For example, we partnered with Resources for the Future and the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities to host a series of roundtables that, in part, explored this topic. We are also working with the National Wild Turkey Federation on an innovative Timber Transport Pilot Project aimed at ensuring timber can be removed and processed, even if local mill capacity may not be enough. Investments made through grant programs like Wood Innovations and Wood Products Economy are also aimed at researching and developing new solutions to this longstanding challenge.

Smoke management continues to pose challenges, as there are negative human health impacts from all forms of



wildland fire smoke. We are working alongside the U.S. Department of the Interior, Environmental Protection Agency, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to both protect public health from the impacts of smoke while enabling land management practices that reduce the risk of large, high-severity wildfire events. This interagency effort will advance public health preparedness, minimize smoke impacts to the public, and ensure regulatory pathways under the Clean Air Act allow for increased use of prescribed fire.

We have also been exploring innovative opportunities to improve access to housing for our employees in areas with a higher cost of living. For example, we entered a 50-year lease agreement in Summit County, CO, to provide affordable housing opportunities to local workers and Forest Service employees through offering the Dillon Ranger Work Center property for lease in a first-of-its-kind agreement.

Uncompetitive pay has also posed a challenge to recruiting and retaining employees. This is especially true with our wildland firefighters. Thanks to investments outlined in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, we have been able to offer a pay supplement to our firefighters. However, this is not a permanent fix. Without a permanent pay solution, firefighters face a pay reduction from current supplemental levels down to previous levels, meaning a drop of \$20,000 per year for most firefighters. Permanent pay reforms require authorizing legislation, and we are committed to working with congressional leaders on developing a comprehensive legislative proposal.

While we have increased the pace and scale of treatments within the National Forest System, it has so far been difficult to do the same across other lands. To address this, we partnered with the Wildland Fire Leadership Council to host an all-lands wildfire resilience framework workshop

in September. The Council will use the information gathered in this workshop to develop an all-lands “playbook” that States, municipalities, Tribes, and private landowners could use to reduce wildfire risk at the pace and scale needed.

“Addressing the wildfire crisis is going to be an intergenerational process. Figuring out how we can all work together, using our strengths to overcome our weaknesses and increase the proactive use of fire, will be critical to starting down this pathway. These investments in place-based solutions are exactly what we need to set out strategically on our journey down this road.”

**Bill Tripp**  
Director of Natural Resources and Environmental Policy  
Karuk Tribe, Department of Natural Resources

# NEXT STEPS

We will build on the successes of fiscal year 2023 by continuing to restore forest health and reduce wildfire risk to communities, critical infrastructure, water supplies, and ecosystems.

In fiscal year 2024, we will invest [approximately \\$400 million](#) of the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to ongoing efforts on the 21 Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscapes, making the total investment to date \$1.6 billion. Inspired by the success of programs such as the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, we will invest an additional \$100 million with our new [Collaborative Wildfire Risk Reduction Program](#) and expand work in high-risk wildfire areas in wildland-urban interface outside of these landscapes.

The 2024 fiscal year will be the last to rely on Inflation Reduction Act funds, while Bipartisan Infrastructure Law investments will continue in annual increments through 2026. As these historic investments come to an end, we will continue to explore other vehicles for implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy (e.g., the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership program, Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, and regular appropriations). However, we know that these program areas will not be sufficient for the amount of work that needs to occur.

We recently implemented a new [community navigator program](#). These community navigators will support leaders in historically underserved communities to find and access funding and partnership support. Connecting communities to the appropriate resources will build wildfire and climate resilience when and where they need it most.

The Wildfire Crisis Strategy Implementation Plan calls for developing long-term maintenance plans beyond the initial 10-year period. We will begin developing those long-term maintenance plans for the landscapes this fiscal year.

Americans need healthy, resilient forests that can withstand stresses like wildfires, droughts, and insect outbreaks. These stressors are inevitable, but they need not be catastrophic. Hand-in-hand with our partners, we will continue implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy to achieve this vision.

"It has been the National Wild Turkey Federation's honor to stand with our longest tenured partner, the USDA Forest Service, to confront the American wildfire crisis. It has not been easy as we have 'ridden the bike while building it,' overcome barriers and entered into a new business model. We have pushed each other and worked together to build this new machine that will move us to the pace and scale necessary to restore these landscapes."

**Tom Spezze**

National Director of Field Conservation and State Policy  
National Wild Turkey Federation





## WILDFIRE CRISIS

# s t r a t e g y

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Cover photo: Forest Service partners meet near Chama, NM, to learn how work on this landscape will protect human communities, wildlife habitat, and critical watersheds. Wildfire risk extends beyond lands managed by the Forest Service, and these partners are critical to the long-term success of the agency's Wildfire Crisis Strategy. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.