



Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 2017 Forest Action Plan

Introduction

The first version of Montana's Forest Action Plan (FAP), previously known as the Statewide Forest Resource Strategy, was crafted in 2010 in response to the USDA Forest Service's State and Private Forestry Redesign Process. As part of the Redesign, states receiving State and Private Forestry funding were required to complete a Statewide Assessment of Forest Resources (SAFR), a comprehensive analysis of the conditions, trends, threats, and opportunities facing their forests. FAPs were subsequently developed as the implementation component of the SAFR. They were intended as strategic documents designed to highlight the major issues in each state, identify priority actions and define the most effective role for state governments in sustaining benefits from state and private forests.

The original Forest Action Plan identified five focus areas: Forest Biodiversity and Resiliency; Wildfire and Public Safety; Forest Products and Biomass Utilization; Sustainable Urban Landscapes; Changing Forest Ownership Patterns.

The 2017 revision of the Forest Action Plan amends the original focus areas to align with the evolution of the Forestry Assistance Bureau, Forestry Division, and general forestry context in Montana. It uses a scaled-down, focused approach to identify the issues over which the DNRC has direct influence, and modifies strategies to reflect the actual functions of Bureau and Division staff. Finally, it omits deliverables, consigning these to annual work plans. The intent of this revision is that the Forestry Assistance program staff who play a role in administering one or more Forestry Assistance programs, can link their daily, monthly, and annual accomplishments directly to elements of the Forest Action Plan.

Part 1 – Our Direction

The mission of the Forestry Assistance Bureau is to provide service to communities and private landowners to promote sustainable forests and watersheds for the benefit of all Montanans.

Since the inception of the Forest Action Plan, additional guidance has significantly influenced the trajectory of Forestry Assistance Bureau programs. New guidelines include the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (2009) and the Governor's Forests in Focus Initiative (2014).

The Cohesive Strategy was initiated to coordinate multi-ownership efforts to achieve three tenets: restore and maintain landscapes, create fire adapted communities, and improve wildfire response (Figure 1). The Cohesive Strategy intends to address four major challenges nationwide: vegetation and fuels management; homes, communities, and values at risk; human-caused ignitions; and effective and efficient wildfire response. In 2012, Montana was one of three states (along with Idaho and Oregon) awarded pilot funding to implement the Cohesive Strategy.

Figure 1: Cohesive Strategy Goals



In 2014, Montana Governor Steve Bullock announced the “Forests in Focus Initiative” (FIF) designed to address challenges and opportunities facing Montana in these key areas: federal forest management; forest restoration and industry retention; tribal, state, and private forests; and collaboration and partnerships (Figure 2). In tandem with FIF, the Montana legislature authorized the use of state funds to accelerate the pace and scale of restoration on private and federal lands.

Figure 2: Forests in Focus



Over the course of a few short years the functions, capacity, and influence of the Forestry Assistance programs have expanded beyond the confines of the original Forest Action Plan. A series of work sessions convened between Bureau and field staff to develop new, more representative focus areas (Figure 3).

Figure 3: 2017 Forest Action Plan Focus Areas



Part 2 – Focus Areas

1) Forest Products and Industry Retention

Issue Statement: Montana’s forest economy comprises timber and non-timber forest products and services, wood energy and renewable resources, a sustainable resource base, a diversity of manufacturers, and a skilled workforce that provides economic, social and ecological value. Diverse and robust forest markets and industry infrastructure in Montana are essential to managing and retaining our forest land base for multiple products and values.

Goal: *Retain and bolster Montana’s forest industry so that forests can be managed in an ecologically and economically practical manner.*

2) Stewardship of Wildland, Rural and Urban Landscapes

Issue statement: Forests are vital to the heritage of the American West, are critical parts of urban infrastructure, and provide significant public benefits. Forest stewardship means recognizing our dependence on forest resources and subsequently using and conserving them in a way that sustains their function, productivity and character. Stewardship responsibilities fall upon a wide diversity of people including land managers, public users, private landowners, communities, tribal members and the forestry workforce. They play a critical role in sustaining these resources.

Goal: *Guide forest owners, managers and communities in implementing stewardship objectives and promote the benefits of engaged forest stewardship.*

3) Forest Restoration, Ecology and Function

Issue statement: Montana forests are diverse and dynamic, spanning watersheds and communities in a variety of landscapes and ecosystems. Wildfire, insects and diseases, non-native invasive organisms, climate, weather events and management practices are all significant drivers of change in Montana’s forests.

Goal: *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.*

4) Federal Forest Management

Issue statement: The major issues affecting forestlands in the West are universal regardless of jurisdictional boundaries. With much of Montana’s forests in federal ownership, it is incumbent upon elected officials, natural resource managers and citizens to support management activities that restore forests, enhance watersheds and reduce wildfire risk.

Goal: *Increase the amount of forest restoration on federal lands through partnerships with government agencies and Montana communities.*

5) Capacity, Collaboration and Partnerships

Issue statement: Community capacity is defined as the skills and resources contained within a landscape, tribe, government, community group, and/or general citizenry with the ability to

apply those skills and resources in response to change. Fostering this capacity through diverse partnerships and collaboration is vital to achieving forest management objectives.

Goal: *Increase the ability of landowners, natural resource managers and communities to meet management objectives by providing financial, technical and logistical support.*

Part 3 – Objectives

- Enforce forest practices laws and rules and promote use of forestry best management practices.
- Promote certification of private forest lands and industry.
- Aid in certification of forest lands and provide positive business environment for forest landowners and wood products industry.
- Recommend appropriate management based on credible science and practices tailored to site-specific needs and landowner/community objectives.
- Serve as a central source for professional, objective guidance in forestry issues.
- Allocate resources to projects that maximize a practical return on investments.
- Assess and address current forestry issues facing landowners, communities and forest products industry.
- Support capacity and networking environments for community, agency and stakeholder engagement.
- Cultivate relationships with potential new partners to expand capacity in the state.
- Provide access to educational, training, and participatory opportunities for resource managers, landowners, and the public.
- Implement Farm Bill Authorities (such as Good Neighbor Authority) along with other executive and legislative authorities with BLM and USFS.
- Solicit funding and provide financial incentives for projects that encourage active forest stewardship.
- Advocate for treatments that generate wood products and renewable energy.
- Assist local government and collaborative groups in effective communication with landowners and managers.
- Promote and deliver high quality seedlings for conservation plantings on a statewide basis.
- Use Forest Action Plan focus areas as screening criteria for project prioritization.
- Actively solicit project ideas from the field staff and partners.

Next Steps

The Forest Action Plan will be used to develop tasks and measure success in annual work plans. Updates will be incorporated as policy, funding, and capacity warrant.

Certification

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