Forest Action Plan

Forestry Assistance Bureau of the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

Our Direction

The mission of the Forestry Assistance Bureau within Forestry Division, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is to provide service to communities, agencies, private landowners, and the forest products industry to promote sustainable forests and watersheds for the benefit of all Montanans.

Since the inception of the original Forest Action Plan (FAP) published in 2010, 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 National 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. It also is designed 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.

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 forest management; and collaboration and partnerships. 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.

Montana's original Forest Action Plan included a matrix to identify deliverables and timelines for each strategy. Over the course of a few short years the functions, capacity, and influence of the Forestry Assistance Bureau have expanded beyond the confines of the original FAP, and its format proved too rigid to readily adapt to the ever-evolving range of programs and desired outcomes of the Forestry Division. The updated FAP replaces the matrix with categories of focus areas, strategies, and listed objectives based upon input from both the bureau and the field. These are more representative of the bureau's work and designed to be easily interpreted or modified over the lifespan of the plan.

2017 Revision

The Plan

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. All focus areas address one or more of the national priorities for Forest Service State and Private Forestry which are to conserve working forest landscapes, protect forests from harm, and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. The revised FAP 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.

Additional documents included in the plan:
Appendix A - State Assessment of Forest Resource Base Findings and GIS Methodology, and
Appendix B - Forest Legacy Assessment of Need

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.

Plan Certification

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Focus Areas & St

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.

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

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.

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

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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 public land managers, users, private landowners, communities, tribal members and the forestry workforce. They play a critical role in sustaining these resources.

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

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.

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

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.

Strategy: 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.

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Objectives

Policy

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.

Implement Farm Bill Authorities (such as Good Neighbor Authority) along with other executive and legislative authorities with BLM and USFS.

Funding

Allocate resources to projects that maximize a practical return on investments.

Solicit funding and provide financial incentives for projects that encourage active forest stewardship.

Advocate for treatments that generate wood products and renewable energy.

Promote and deliver high quality seedlings for conservation plantings on a statewide basis.

Capacity

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.

Assist local government and collaborative groups in effective communication with landowners and managers.

Technical

Recommend appropriate management based on credible science and proven practices tailored to site-specific needs and landowner/community objectives.

Serve as a central source for professional, objective guidance in forestry issues.

Assess and address current forestry issues facing landowners, communities and forest products industry.

Use Forest Action Plan focus areas as screening criteria for project prioritization.

Actively solicit project ideas from field staff and partners.

Resources Required

Implementation this Forest Action Plan requires a combination of state and federal resources. Additional third-party funds may expedite implementation and will be pursued where applicable. A creative, flexible approach is required for optimal use of all funds. The resources at our disposal address multiple strategies in this plan and can be employed interchangeably and adaptively to most effectively meet the objectives of the FAP. They include:

Federal funding through consolidated grant and competitive programs such as the Chiefs Joint Landscape Restoration Partnership, Evaluation Monitoring Grant Program, Urban and Community Forestry Program Development Grants, and Wood Utilization Assistance Program.

Complementary funding from state general fund and special revenue to augment federal program performance. Examples include supplementary funding for stewardship program implementation, income generated pursuant to a Good Neighbor Authority Agreement, funding from the Resource Indemnity Trust, and special revenue and products generated by the state conservation seedling nursery.

The ability to match federal funds under terms of the consolidate grant program rather than programmatically, whenever possible.

Mechanisms that allow the DNRC to identify, pursue, and accept funding from third-party partners.

Staff who are resourceful and encouraged by leadership to experiment with new approaches, adapt their programs to changing conditions, and capitalize on synergies between programs.

Ability to deliver our programs through varied partners including but not limited to municipal governments, non-profits, conservation districts, and landowner organizations.