



## PRIORITY GOAL: HEALTHY FORESTS

### OVERVIEW

Healthy forests are critical to maintaining a robust economy, serving as places of beauty that attract tourism and stand as stewards of the air and water Arizonans need to survive. Through shared stewardship across multiple land management agencies, we can restore our forests to a healthy state.

### VISION

The **Statewide Sustainability Roadmap** outlines an ecosystem, community, and economic vision of forest health.

#### Ecosystem Vision

- 1 Are resilient to effects of climate change impacts, drought, severe wildfire, and insect and disease infestation.
- 2 Mitigate greenhouse gas and air pollutants emissions from severe wildfire, and continue to sequester carbon.
- 3 Provide landscape-scale habitat and connectivity that sustains wildlife, fisheries, and forest biodiversity, and provides needed ecosystem service.
- 4 Have a naturally occurring interval of low-intensity ground fire as a part of functioning and healthy southwest forest ecosystems.

#### Community Vision

- 1 Support healthy, vibrant, and safe communities and lives.
- 2 Provide most surface water supplies, ecosystems services and functions to millions of residents across Arizona.
- 3 Preserve our valuable natural resources and provide diverse and responsible recreational opportunities.

#### Economic Vision

- 1 Improve water quality while lessening water treatment and facility costs.
- 2 Utilize water and streamflow that generates hydroelectric energy from existing sources.
- 3 Create and sustain a healthy and robust forest product industry, job creation, and economic opportunities in Arizona communities
- 4 Attract tourists who spend billions of dollars throughout the state.

## CHALLENGES & ISSUES

Our forests have reached a critical stage due to lack of action. They are unhealthy, dry, and overgrown, providing the fuel to create catastrophic wildfires. The **Statewide Sustainability Roadmap** identifies ecosystem, community, and economic challenges faced by land management agencies and key stakeholders.

### Ecosystem Challenges

- Overstocked, dense, unhealthy forests resulting from decades of fire suppression.
- Threats of large, high-severity wildfire and post-wildfire impacts.
- Increased invasive vegetation and noxious weed encroachment.
- Unhealthy forests and chronic drought heighten insect and disease infestations, severe wildfire threats and wildfire emissions (greenhouse gases, air pollutants), water quality degradation and reduced water quantity, and loss of iconic species including Saguaro and Ponderosa Pine.

#### These challenges result in:

- Reduced stability of carbon stocks and loss of forest as carbon sinks.
- Loss of contiguous habitat that sustains wildlife, fisheries and forest biodiversity.
- Loss of ecosystem services.



Kaibab National Forest, Arizona

### Community Challenges

- Need to address wildfire liability, increasing insurance costs, and lack of insurance products for homeowners and businesses.
- Need to proactively protect communities, businesses, and neighborhoods from fire damage and post-fire flooding impacts.
- High-severity wildfire smoke emissions cause significant health issues for at-risk populations.
- Need to assess potential loss of property value and habitat values due to wildfire.

#### These challenges result in:

- Loss of lives, communities, livelihoods, and quality of life.
- Increased threat of costly wildfires, drought-induced tree mortality, and post-fire floods that threaten our homes and businesses.
- Threats to the quantity and quality of drinking water for the majority of our residents.
- Damage to critical infrastructure and property and community well-being.
- Threats to at-risk populations from severe wildfire smoke emissions.



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## CHALLENGES & ISSUES

### Economic Challenges

- Need to rapidly increase the and scale of forest restoration due to the lack of local forest products industry capacity and related startup and investment costs.
- Need to develop additional economic, sustainability, and financial incentives for partners to invest in forest restoration, resulting in more successful and larger scale forest restoration efforts to deal with climate change and severe wildfire.
- Expand Conservation Finance (CF) opportunities and pilot projects.

### These challenges result in:

- Loss of our valuable natural resources and recreational opportunities, impacting local and state economies.
- Loss of property value from severe wildfire.

Compounding these challenges are overarching **policy issues**, such as the need for modernization across land management agencies and long-term agency capacity and funding needs.

## GOALS & POTENTIAL ACTIONS

The **Statewide Sustainability Roadmap** identifies ecosystem, community, and policy actions that are necessary to protect and enhance Arizona's forests. Arizona Forward's goal is to promote a holistic approach for the proactive management of our forests.

### Ecosystem Actions

- 1 Perform landscape-scale forest restoration including forest thinning, prescribed burning, non-native and invasive species management, and stream and riparian restoration work.
- 2 Perform sediment and soil erosion management to improve watershed resiliency.
- 3 Support habitat improvement, enhancement, and connectivity projects.
- 4 Assessment and communication of carbon storage in forests, impacts of climate change, and forest restoration and carbon benefits.



Prescribed burn - Santa Catalina Mountains, Arizona



Coconino National Forest, Arizona



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## GOALS & POTENTIAL ACTIONS

### Community Actions

- 1 Develop and implement smoke mitigation strategies for at-risk populations.
- 2 Improve statewide stakeholder understanding of where drinking water comes from, existing forest conditions, need for restoration, benefits, and the importance of healthy forests.
- 3 Increase existing capacity and attracting new forest products industry, with appropriate incentives in place.
- 4 Invest in and implement forest product industry and prescribed fire workforce training.
- 5 Invest in advancement of wood and biomass utilization and technology.
- 6 Invest in infrastructure including road and rail to enable removal of wood and biomass material.
- 7 Balance public and private investment to address healthy forest issues.

### Policy Actions

- 1 Engage in national, regional and local level forest health discussions and collaborative decision-making.
- 2 Implement shared stewardship and integrated decision-making of all forested lands within Arizona.
- 3 Support policy making that increases National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process efficiency to accelerate forest restoration treatments.
- 4 Support modernization of land management agency policies, practices and guidelines.
- 5 Promote and support collaborative and stakeholder restoration and forest industry development efforts.
- 6 Promote long-term capacity and funds needs through return on investment (ROI) messaging.
- 7 Support local and regional efforts for forest work training.

### Sources of funding available to support these actions include:

- Investment by private firms in the forest products industry.
- State matching funds, tax abatement, low interest loans, and loan guarantees.
- Job creation through development of a forest product industry and businesses.
- State and local tax revenue sources (e.g., the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project).
- Continued investment in restoration programs such as Four Forest Restoration Initiative and others.
- Conservation finance mechanisms and incentive programs focused on ecosystem services.
- USDA Rural Development – loan guarantee opportunities for forest products industry.

## STAKEHOLDERS & PARTNERS

### Project Leads

- Elvy Barton, Salt River Project
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### Contributors

- 4 Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI)
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- Arizona Game and Fish Department
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- Mother Road Brewing Co.
- Northern Arizona University – ERI
- National Forest Foundation
- Salt River Project
- The Nature Conservancy
- U.S. Forest Service New Mexico Regional Office



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