

IN THE PATH OF FIRE

A plan to protect the Western dry forests of the US



In the West, wildfire touches everyone. Megafires and severe blazes threaten our communities. They threaten our air and water, habitat for thousands of native species and the very existence of our forests. Though Western dry forests evolved with frequent wildfires of low and moderate severity, today, they are highly susceptible to uncharacteristically large and severe fires. A century of fire exclusion, unsustainable logging, development, and the displacement of native forest stewards who developed cultural fire practices over millennia, created this crisis, but climate change has amplified it with catastrophic results. Now, it's time to harness the power of "good fire," and catalyze forest restoration on a scale that can transform the West.

The science is clear, there is no plausible future in Western forests without fire. It is simply a question of how and when forests will burn. Will we make fire a restorative force, or cement its role as a destructive one?

The Nature Conservancy has worked decades to promote "good fire" and ecological forest restoration (including ecological thinning and controlled burning) as a management tool and key component of overall forest resilience. But despite the proven effectiveness of our work, we are far from achieving the scale and quality of impact needed to protect our Western dry forests. This is, in part, because practitioners have lacked the resources and coordination to maximize our contribution across the region, **until now.**

Congress recently allocated over \$5.5 billion in new funding toward wildfire risk reduction and ecosystem restoration through the bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). But without a strategic and coordinated effort, even this unprecedented support will not beat the clock of climate change.

The country needs a seasoned practitioner to lead the charge, and the Conservancy is extremely well positioned to fill this role. We have a proven track record of complementing the work of the US Forest and partnering with them to move more quickly and effectively. At the same time, we are expanding our collaborations with Tribes to pursue co-management models.

The Conservancy's 's Goal for Equitable Conservation in Western Dry Forests

- Increase resilience of 50 million acres of dry forests by 2030.
- Conduct restoration treatments, including ecological thinning and burning on a transformative scale.

- Promote Tribal access and co-management. Design ecological thinning and burning restoration treatments to include all those effected by fire, including those historically excluded from the conversation, regardless of race, ethnicity, language, or income.

The Opportunity: Make The Nature Conservancy a Forest Restoration Engine for the West

The Conservancy is launching a new initiative to catalyze forest restoration on a scale that can transform the West. Our three-part plan addresses landscape-scale goals, and an organizational staffing structure to ensure we have the resources for execution.

A Unified Western Strategy

1. **Maximize Federal Funding and Impact.** Guide the Implementation of US Forest Service strategy and the deployment of new federal funding through the IIJA and IRA.
2. **Increase Ecological Forest Restoration.** Conduct landscape-scale ecological forest restoration, including more “good fire” on the ground, through TNC’s own projects, designed to model effective management for organizations like the US Forest Service.
3. **Change the Narrative.** Develop a communications and storytelling strategy to drive public support and influence key decision-makers around forests and fire in the West.

Staffing and Resourcing

TNC has identified the following positions necessary to carry out our Western Dry Forests and Fire initiative:

1. **Initiative Director** to lead and guide execution of the unified Western strategy within TNC and with external partners.
2. **Government Relations Lead** to serve as an expert resource, identify and pursue collective policy actions at the federal and multi-state level, and liaise directly with the US Forest Service.
3. **Project Manager** to provide operational and logistical coordination to the Initiative Director for project management for the Western strategy.
4. **Strategic Communications Capacity** to develop and deliver a unified narrative on forests and fire across the West using strategic messaging campaigns to influence desired actions or outcomes.
5. **Science Capacity** to ensure that the initiative is driven and supported by a rigorous evidence base incorporating multiple knowledge traditions and addresses priority scientific endeavors across the West.
6. **Tribal Engagement Capacity:** Ensure that Tribal partnerships, ecological knowledge, access and funding are prioritized in the development and implementation of this plan.

Join Us

TNC is the only global organization with the reach and expertise to put the forests of the West back on a path to health. With a unified plan and dedicated staff, we can influence key decision-makers and lead with science. It’s time to fight fire with fire.