

State Forestry UPDATE

What's Happening in Western Forests

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Introduction to CWSF

The Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF) is a non-partisan, nonprofit membership organization comprised of 17 western U.S. state foresters and six territorial foresters from American-affiliated Pacific islands. Located in Denver, Colorado, the CWSF has a small staff that leverages the work of our membership through partnerships with other non-profits, as well as federal and state agencies, all promoting the goals to conserve, protect and enhance western forests and lands. This includes the CWSF's delivery of the western Forestry Leadership Coalition (WFLC), a unique partnership between CWSF and Western federal forestry leaders from the U.S. Forest Service.

CWSF provides insight on the many complex, interrelated factors at play in western forestry and the programs and strategies of greatest importance to the health and sustainability of western and Pacific island forests. Our issue areas include forest health, sustainability, climate change, wildland fire and water. Our members, the state forestry agency directors, are the subject matter experts in our field and their collective knowledge allows CWSF to speak across the western landscape on issues of the day.

Drawing on the expertise of our members, CWSF conducts research, compiles reports and delivers legislative and policy interpretation to inform partners and policymakers about the critical issues in western forest management. CWSF collaborates with partners across jurisdictional boundaries to promote sustainable forest management, to protect forests from threats, and to enhance forest health.

Relationship to NWOA Regions and Issues

CWSF serves the states in the National Woodland Owners Association's Rocky Mountain Region (Wyoming, Colorado,

New Mexico, South Dakota, Kansas and Nebraska), Northwest Region (Alaska, Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana) and Southwest Region (California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona and Hawaii).

Within each of our member states and islands, a variety of issues in forest and land management are overseen by each forestry agency. The state agencies that are members of the CWSF deliver programs and support to woodland owners in their respective states.

As stated previously, CWSF primarily focuses on five issue areas providing information and support to our members, guided by our strategic plan, the national priorities and the top forestry issues faced annually across our member states and islands. CWSF provides the network and information needed to provide learning, leadership and technical information to our members and partners.

States use the Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies (Forest Action Plans) to identify priority areas and issues for their state. The Forest Action Plans provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends across the state, and sometimes across state boundaries, including lands under all ownerships. These priorities and trends are used to identify the CWSF, and WFLC, priority issues.

This means that the work that the CWSF does at a regional level directly impacts program delivery and work of interest to woodland owners.

CWSF also works closely to align our issues with the U.S. Forest Service State & Private Forestry Program (S&PF) National Priorities. S&PF prioritizes conserving working forest landscapes, protecting forests from harm, and enhancing public benefits from trees and forests. These priorities are integrated within our five issues of forest health, sustainability, climate change, wildland fire and water. State and federal forestry leaders work corroboratively through the S&PF programs to effectively address the region's critical forest resource issues



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Executive director of the Council of Western State Foresters.

across ownerships and jurisdictions. These non-regulatory, incentive-based programs deliver expert advice and financial assistance to landowners and communities for the protection, management and sustainability of their forest resources.

CWSF members also undertake activities related to the Top Ten forestry issues for NWOA members including timber markets, invasives and forest health, keeping forests as forests, water quality, wildfire issues and certification.

Issues that Matter To Western Woodland Owners

CWSF's issues are explored in-depth in the following narrative, to paint a clear picture of the significant overlap between NWOA's 2016 forestry issues and CWSF's issue areas.

Partnerships and collaboration are key to achieving success in our priority areas and identifying opportunities to work together is an important piece of reaching our individual organizational goals. Just as forests don't know jurisdictional boundaries, we believe it is important to work together across state lines and across organizations. It is evident that forestry organizations and landowners are facing many of the same challenges and opportunities. Working together, we can achieve much greater results, as demonstrated in the following examples.

Wildland Fire

It is no surprise to landowners that wildland fire is a pervasive issue—and a pressing management challenge—across the West.

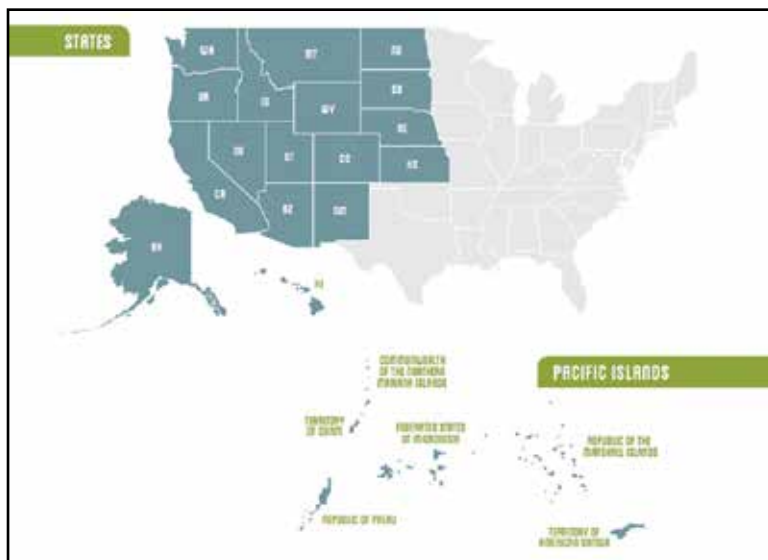
Today, the average fire season is 78 days longer than in the 1970s according to the U.S. Forest Service. Fire costs accounted for 16 percent of the Forest Service's total budget in fiscal year 1995 and surpassed 50 percent in fiscal year 2015. States spend an annual average of \$1.6 billion on the prevention, control, and management of wildfire.

Future fire seasons are expected to grow hotter, longer, more unpredictable and more expensive. Factors contributing to the increasing wildland fire risk across the West include human development in the wildland urban interface (WUI), forest health deteriorating across large-scale landscapes, increased presence and tree mortality by native and invasive pests, climate variability and extreme weather and drought.

CWSF works with partners and Western leaders on policies, programs and approaches to address this issue. CWSF supports a comprehensive approach to wildland fire management that meets the three goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy: 1. Resilient Landscapes; 2. Fire Adapted Communities; and 3. Safe and Effective Wildfire Response. These goals are achieved by supporting important programs such as U.S. Forest Service State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs, along with other vital wildfire prevention and preparedness programs to protect local communities and reduce the risk of future fires. Further, state foresters continue to call for a solution to address the wildland fire suppression funding challenges at the U.S. Forest Service and the Department of the Interior.

Forest Health

NWOA's 2016 top issues include Invasives and Forest Health. Forest health is one of CWSF's five issue areas and invasive species are a high priority for CWSF members. Emerald ash



borer has recently been sighted in western states including parts of Colorado, Kansas and Nebraska. This invasive metallic-green beetle causes great concern for both landowners and state foresters.

As landowners know, forest health is deteriorating across the Western U.S. and Pacific islands. The problems are complex and multifaceted and have significant impacts across large scale forested landscapes. Many forest stands are overly dense and therefore competing for water and nutrients. Human development continues to encroach on these landscapes resulting in parcelization and forest fragmentation. There is an increasing frequency of catastrophic wildfire, invasive species spread and large-scale insect and disease impacts. Coupled with climate variability and drought, urban and rural forests across the western landscape are in critical need of intentional management and restoration treatments. Challenges to addressing and overcoming forest health decline include: reductions in timber supply, diminishing viable wood products markets, threats from wildfire, insects, disease, and invasive species, uncertainty about the future of carbon markets and biomass utilization, generational turnover among non-industrial private forest landowners, funding cuts for natural resources programs at all levels, unnatural wildfire fuels conditions due to suppression efforts, and lack of management. These are just a few of the challenges woodland owners and CWSF members are facing every day.

State forestry agencies are a vital resource for landowners across the nation and CWSF members work directly with landowners to address forest health issues. From 2010 through 2014, Wyoming State Forestry Division (WSFD) provided technical forestry assistance in some form to 1,972 private landowners across Wyoming. Additionally, over the last five years, there have been nearly 135 Forest Stewardship Plans created for private landowners that amounted to roughly 60,805 forested acres being placed under management plans. These management plans are critical pieces in conserving and managing a working forest landscape for the future.

Sustainability

From tropical forests to dry climate needle leaf forests, boreal forests to temperate rainforests, the forests of the West and Pacific islands contain some of the most diverse and rich flora and fauna on earth. All across the region, forests—and the values they provide—are under pressure from human

development and population growth. The encroachment on forest lands leads to fragmentation, parcelization and higher management and wildfire protection costs.

Western states and Pacific island territories agree that sustainable forestry requires: addressing major risks and threats (catastrophic wildfire, human development, native and non-native pests), supporting working forests and a viable forest products industry, and educating the public, partners, the administration and Congress about the importance of forests, their values and benefits.

CWSF supports forest management practices that balance long-term economic, social and ecological sustainability, resulting in resilient forests that provide a multitude of benefits for local communities across the West. Further, CWSF supports the use and creation of sound policies, practices and incentives that keep working forests working by:

- Creating opportunities for actions that span boundaries, strengthen partnerships and support active forest management across all land ownerships;
- Supporting vibrant urban and community forests that sustain the health and well-being of the public and serves to connect people with forests; *and*
- Encouraging forest products industries for traditional markets as well as opportunities for new and emerging forest markets.

Western forests provide critical ecosystem services such as clean water, wildlife habitat, wood products, flood protection, erosion control carbon sequestration and much more.

In 2015, South Dakota Department of Agriculture, Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry was awarded funds through the WFLC Western Landscape Scale Restoration grant competition. The project developed a model for shared land management in the Black Hills on a landscape-scale between private landowners, non-governmental agencies and the state and federal governments. The goals identified in this successful project included: 1.) The hiring of a Resource Conservationist to reduce the backlog of forest stewardship plan requests in order to mitigate forest fragmentation, improve habitat connectivity, and increase fuels reduction; and 2.) The improvement of forest management on private lands in close proximity to federal and state forest lands to improve forest health and wildlife habitat.

This grant enabled South Dakota to facilitate collaboration with multiple forest management entities while securing a positive outcome for private landowners ensuring the sustainability of their forests and lands.

Water

Water is the lifeblood of the natural systems, economies and culture of the western U.S. and Pacific islands. Yet across the West, water quality and quantity continues to be challenged. As a result, all CWSF members have identified water as a critical priority within their Forest Action Plans. According to the U.S. Forest Service, western forests are the source for two-thirds of the region's water supply.

The threats to western forested watersheds are many and complex: Human development and forest fragmentation (loss of forest cover), declining forest health, increasing catastrophic wildland fire (degraded forests and watersheds), and widespread drought. Of the many uses, benefits and resources provided by western forests, water is among the most critical given its essential value for human life and the health of our natural landscapes. Western forested watersheds also contribute significantly to the health of the aquatic habitat of hundreds

of fish and wildlife species, many of which are threatened or endangered. Fresh water is particularly important to the Pacific islands, where streams provide water for drinking, cooking, bathing and recreation, as well as support healthy coral reef ecosystems.

In 2015, the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) released a report on forestry best management practices (BMPs) for water quality, accompanied by an interactive map detailing practices in each state. The Protecting Water Quality through State Forestry Best Management Practices report can be found online at <http://bit.ly/NASFWaterBMP>.

Additionally, as described in Idaho Department of Land's Forest Action Plan National Priorities, Idaho and Montana coordinated a Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality project. This project provided educational tools for forest managers, contractors, and landowners to ensure best management practices are implemented correctly. The project developed a user-friendly field guide, 40-minute instructional video, and web site available at <http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/idahoforestrybmps/>.

CWSF works to protect, restore and enhance water quality and quantity across the West through widespread collaboration across state lines and jurisdictional boundaries on policy development and program delivery.

Climate Change

Western and Pacific island forests play a critical role in the national strategy to address climate change and variability. It is essential that these forests and the benefits that they provide—carbon sequestration, forest products, clean air, clean water—be a part of regional and national climate solutions.

Western forests are continually faced with new stressors and challenges such as: catastrophic wildfire, drought, deteriorating forest health, native and invasive species and disease, and fragmentation and conversion of forests. The impacts of climate variability are wide-ranging. Sustainable forest management and forest conservation are needed to ensure that western and Pacific island forests continue to remove carbon from the atmosphere, improve soil and water quality and reduce wildfire risk.

In an effort to reduce the impacts of wildfires on communities and threatened rare habitats near them, Hawaii works to educate teachers, students, and other community members on wildfire concepts. As referenced in the Hawaii Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife (DOFAW) Forest Action Plan, DOFAW has helped to develop and update 13 Community Wildfire Protection Plans across the state.

Working Together

The highlighted examples from our member agencies demonstrate the clear overlap between the interests and priorities of the National Woodland Owners Association and the Council of Western State Foresters. This is especially evident within NWOA's Rocky Mountain, Northwest and Southwest Regions. Organizations and associations such as ours ensure there is representation on our priority issues at both the regional and national level. Working together to leverage this important work will ensure continued success.

We encourage you to learn more about the Council of Western State Foresters by visiting www.westernforesters.org. We also invite you to sign up for our monthly e-newsletter at <http://bit.ly/CWSFnewsletter>.

