



CWSF
COUNCIL OF WESTERN
STATE FORESTERS

Photo: Joel Prince, NASF

Western Forestry Issues:

FOREST HEALTH



Across the western U.S. and U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Islands, forest health is critical to maintaining the benefits of trees and forest lands to residents, from rural timber economies to urban and community trees that provide shade and mental health benefits. However, western forests are now faced with a growing number of stressors that impact their ability to sustain these benefits. The problems are complex, multifaceted, and have significant impacts across large-scale forested landscapes.

Many forest stands are overly dense and therefore compete for water and nutrients. Human development continues to encroach on forested landscapes, resulting in parcelization and forest fragmentation. The frequency of catastrophic wildfire, invasive species spread, and large-scale insect and disease impacts are all increasing. Coupled with climate variability and drought, urban and rural forests across the western landscape are in critical need of intentional management and restoration treatments.

The Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF) supports sound policies, effective management strategies, constructive partnerships, and collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries that focuses on improving the health and resiliency of western and Pacific Island forests. CWSF and its members and partners coordinate efforts across boundaries in order to mitigate threats to forest resources, support forest sector infrastructure, and maintain other benefits provided by healthy forests.

Challenges to addressing and overcoming forest health decline include:

- Reductions in timber supply and 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 the build up of fuel loads and lack of management

In the West, approximately 242 million acres of forestlands are publicly owned, and 104 million acres are owned privately¹. The presence of these threats to forest health and resilience at the nexus of public, private, and state lands in the western U.S. makes the cross-boundary, collaborative work of CWSF critical to the continued health of western forests.

¹ USDA Forest Service

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