



**CWSE**  
COUNCIL OF WESTERN  
STATE FORESTERS

# WILDFIRE

## HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

📷 OR | Joel Prince



**Wildfire activity** in the Western United States has **grown significantly in frequency, severity, and size**, creating pressing **challenges for land managers and communities**.

Extended fire seasons, hotter and drier conditions, and the expansion of development in the wildland-urban interface (WUI) all contribute to the **increasing complexity of wildfire response, mitigation, and recovery**.

### **STATE FORESTRY AGENCIES LEAD THE WAY**

State forestry agencies are responsible for **wildfire response on over 1.1 billion acres** of land and respond to more than 80% of wildfires nationwide.

In 2024, state fire protection covered **more than 390 million acres of private land** and **over 126 million acres of federal land** across the western states and Pacific Islands.

The state and local wildland fire response community includes **over 225,000 firefighters** who play a critical role in being the **first responders for wildfire response and forest stewardship**.



“ State forestry agencies and our local partners bring thousands of trained firefighters, engines, aircraft, and deep community relationships to the table. Paired with federal resources, these capabilities allow us to respond quickly to fires, protect lives and property, and strengthen long-term community resilience. This work goes beyond suppression - it’s a year-round collaboration on fuels treatments, prescribed fire, preparedness, and forest health. ”

**GEORGE GEISSLER**

State Forester | Washington Department of Natural Resources



📷 CA | Leslie Robertson

## ! CRITICAL INVESTMENTS



Investments in wildfire management, such as the **State Fire Assistance (SFA)** and **Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA)** Program, are fundamental programs that **equip states and communities with critical financial and technical support.**

### SFA AND VFA PROGRAMS:

- Support fuels reduction work
- Safeguard firefighting resources
- Enhance public safety
- Help to build overall response capacity

In 2024, Western states and Pacific Islands **received over \$52 million in federal funding through the SFA program** and **over \$9 million through the VFA program**, each matched with an equal or greater investment from states.

State forestry agencies play a vital role in bolstering local wildfire response capacity.

IN 2024 ALONE,  
STATES PROVIDED  
SUPPORT TO:



**2,366**  
VOLUNTEER FIRE  
DEPARTMENTS



**1,507** COMMUNITIES  
THROUGH SFA & VFA

From 2019 to 2025, the **SFA WUI Competitive Grant program** helped drive nearly **\$194 million** in wildfire mitigation efforts. With **\$94.6 million** in federal funding requests and **\$99.2 million** in matching state and partner contributions, the program supported fuel treatments, education, and mitigation planning.



More than **85%** of Montana's partnering **local government fire departments** are **staffed solely by volunteer firefighters**, providing fire protection across 50 million acres. In the same calendar year, 372 volunteer fire departments among Montana's 385 rural fire departments were provided **assistance through the VFA program.**



NE | Ben Bohall



In Southwest Nebraska, the [McCook Public Power Project](#) utilized **SFA WUI funding to create fuel breaks to maintain power to water supplies**, provide access to firefighters, prepare for future prescribed fire, and prevent wildfire starts.

**Targeted mitigation** investments lead to **healthier, more resilient forests** and rangelands, which in turn **reduce the costs** of catastrophic wildfires. Every dollar invested in forest restoration can provide up to seven dollars of return in the form of benefits and provide a return-on-investment of 600% (*Hjerpe et al., 2024*).

These efforts go hand in hand with proper defensible space, Community Wildfire Protection Plans, Firewise communities, and public outreach campaigns that **help communities prepare for and live with wildfire**.



During the 2024 fire season, Utah had 1,244 fires, and only 89 exceeded 10 acres. Additionally, they saw a **notable decline in human-caused wildfires**, from 70% in 2020 to 57% in 2024.

## **\$ UNDERSTANDING THE FULL COSTS**

**Beyond the commonly reported suppression costs and structure losses, wildfires also result in many other economic and societal costs.** These costs, such as disruption to water supply, flood damage, reduced air quality, and lost economic opportunity, are harder to quantify and frequently overlooked. *The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western U.S.* describes the full range of costs associated with wildland fire in the Western U.S. and demonstrates that these costs are vastly underestimated and often difficult to quantify.



**Learn more by scanning the QR code or visiting [www.thewflc.org/truencostofwildfire](http://www.thewflc.org/truencostofwildfire)**

To request printed copies of the report, email [info@westernforesters.org](mailto:info@westernforesters.org).

## **▶ THE PATH FORWARD**

**CONTINUED FEDERAL INVESTMENTS** and **INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION** are key to strengthening mitigation, reducing long-term wildfire impacts, and ensuring the safety and resilience of communities across the West.



The Council of Western State Foresters (CWSF) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization comprised of 17 western State Foresters and six U.S.-Affiliated Pacific Island Foresters. Learn more about CWSF at [www.westernforesters.org](http://www.westernforesters.org).