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 continue to be challenged.

As a result, the 17-state and six-island Western state and Pacific island CWSF members have identified water as a critical priority within their Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies, commonly called Forest Action Plans.

How are forests and water interconnected?

Clean and abundant water is a direct result of healthy, resilient forests. And healthy, resilient forests are the result of policies and strategies.

In fact, Western forests are the source for two-thirds of the region’s water supply. Over 64 million Westerners (across 11 states) depend on surface water that comes from forests and other lands for their clean drinking water.

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)
- Widespread drought

Of the many uses, benefits and resources provided by Western forests, water is among the most important 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 for healthy coral reef ecosystems.

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.

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1 USDA Forest Service
2 The American Forest Foundation