GREATER FLAGSTAFF FORESTS PARTNERSHIP

Restoring Forest Ecosystems and Protecting Our Community

Annual Report – 2015

The Greater Flagstaff Forests Partnership (GFFP) is a viable, respected, community-based organization that supports collaborative efforts and has been a leader in researching and demonstrating approaches to forest ecosystem restoration in the ponderosa pine forests surrounding Flagstaff, Arizona since 1996. GFFP is one of the longest standing forest restoration collaborative organizations in the country and has been recognized as a national model. Various organizations are represented within GFFP including academic; private; and municipal, state and federal agencies.

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Our Vision: To research and demonstrate the various approaches to forest ecosystem restoration in the ponderosa pine forests, our actions are based on improving the overall sustainability and resiliency of the forests in the greater Flagstaff area. Sustainable and resilient forests are those that have the capacity to recover to pre-disturbance composition, structure, and/or function over time and can be maintained for future generations of forest users. As GFFP works towards future sustainability and resiliency of our forests and communities, our efforts focus on: 1) multi-agency planning and coordinated and complimentary implementation of forest restoration projects, 2) monitoring and adaptive management, 3) outreach and education, and 4) utilization of small diameter trees and woody biomass.

In 2015, GFFP's work plan and accomplishments were focused on the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI), the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP), the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network (FACLN), and in cost-share programs that encourage and fund on-the-ground forest restoration treatments on private properties in and around Flagstaff.

Planning and Implementation. This year, GFFP has primarily focused on strategic involvement in the planning and implementation efforts of two major projects in the area; the 4FRI and FWPP. In 2015, GFFP took a leadership role in 4FRI's Multi-Party Monitoring Board (MPMB). GFFP assisted the U. S. Forest Service (USFS) with the objection process for both projects. This assured the Final Environmental Impact Statements' (FEIS) success. In addition, GFFP has contracted with the City of Flagstaff to work on various aspects for the FWPP in five broad areas: outreach, implementation, monitoring, tribal engagement and grants. GFFP was awarded a Wildland Fire/Hazardous Fuel (WFHF) grant received from AZ State Forestry Division ($192,000) to provide cost-share assistance to cover a portion of the cost of conducting forest treatments on non-federal lands. This year, the Partnership began to plan for treatments on a total of 192 acres including Ft. Tuthill, the Arboretum, and smaller tracks of private land. The Partnership also assisted the City of Flagstaff's Fire Department with implementing a Western Bark Beetle Initiative (WBBI) grant for treatment of 475 acres on Observatory Mesa, part of the FWPP area. Since 2004, the cost share program has resulted in total funding of upwards of $1 million that has been distributed to property owners to treat approximately 2,250 acres of land. The Partnership would like to recognize Perkins Timber Harvesting for their service to GFFP in moving slash piles on Route 66.

Harvesting Operations on Observatory Mesa

Monitoring and Adaptive Management. GFFP continues to monitor activities in order to understand how actions effect ecosystems and communities. Based on monitoring results, application of adaptive management practices promotes enhanced economic, social and ecological outcomes and sustainability. GFFP is working with the 4FRI's MPMB to conduct ecological and socioeconomic monitoring projects in areas like songbird and forest structure/vegetation inventories. GFFP took a leadership role in conducting economic monitoring through the development of contractor reporting forms. The Partnership was awarded a Coconino County Community Grant to develop this project. Further, GFFP hosted a workshop for stakeholders to begin updates to FWPP's City Monitoring Plan. Collectively, these efforts assisted in conducting monitoring projects that better determine FWPP and 4FRI effectiveness.

Public Outreach and Education. GFFP continued as a national hub with the FACLN. The FACLN supported the Partnership to develop and share best practices and innovations that accelerate the adoption of fire adapted community concepts. By engaging with this network, GFFP committed to developing and implementing innovative activities that increase the Flagstaff community's resilience to wildfire. Notable activities completed this year included: 1) harvesting methods fact sheets (designed to assist the public in better understanding the various techniques used in FWPP), 2) FWPP and prescribed fire videos, and 3) FireWise Landscape Contest and awards luncheon. GFFP displayed an informational booth and and engaged with attendees at Salt River Project's "Healthy Forest, Vibrant Economy" conference. The Partnership led several field tours into Observatory Mesa for stakeholders, the public, leaders and decision makers and students from Northern Arizona University (NAU). In addition, GFFP organized three Festival of Science events to inform citizens of our progress in restoring forested ecosystems in and around Flagstaff.

Tour with NAU Class on Observatory Mesa

Utilization and Economic Development. The Partnership continued to be involved with other FWPP and 4FRI stakeholders to pursue and promote new ways of reducing treatment costs, modify forest density and fuel loads, minimize fire risk, while promoting economically viable solutions to forest restoration efforts. GFFP continued to seek opportunities to attract businesses that use woody biomass by-products from local forest restoration projects. The Partnership engaged and worked with local contractors to assist in implementing cost-share treatments on Observatory Mesa. During this process, a designation by description, known as "DxD," was tested and implemented. This type of site preparation eliminated the need to mark every tree. This resulted in reducing operational costs and these savings were used to treat additional acres. In addition, GFFP provided an assessment, "Lessons Learned Using a DxD Cutter Select Method." This assessment can be used by others to implement a similar method and provide cost savings to projects across the state.

Trucking Biomass

Management and Administration. The Partnership targets limited funding to specific project areas through contract work. Partners help to develop and guide activities and specific programs, and then organizations or individuals with expertise specific to each task are contracted to complete projects. GFFP also engaged students as paid interns from NAU that provided them with valuable experience, while assisted us in our efforts. In addition, the Partnership continued to seek external grant funding to supplement our work. This year, GFFP was awarded grants from the FACLN and the County's Community Initiative Grant Program. The GFFP Board of Directors meets monthly to review financial status, complete other administrative duties and coordinates with and oversees project contractors. This model, initiated in 2008, has assisted with our financial viability and has proved effective. As a result, administrative expenses are limited to insurance; accounting and bookkeeping services; office space, supplies, and expenses; and website hosting and maintenance.

Looking Forward: In 1996, the Partnership began efforts to determine how the community should address the forest health crisis and protect Flagstaff from threats presented by wildfires burning in the area. We've come a long way.

Abert's Squirrel in Our Forests

In 2016, GFFP plans to provide support for:

- The 4FRI project's implementation of the first analysis area in primarily the Coconino and Kaibab National Forests;
- Support FWPP efforts through monitoring, outreach, tribal engagement and financial leverage;
- Implement effective treatments and continue to seek cost-share funding for targeted private lands;
- Increase the Flagstaff community's awareness, mitigation and resilience to wildfire through implementing FACLN activities;
- Support internships for NAU students to provide services that achieve our goals;
- Participate in regional workshops and conferences that support restoration efforts and our goals; and
- Continue to develop and implement monitoring and adaptive management to assure effectiveness.

GFFP Board of Directors (2015)

Mark Brehl, *President*, Arizona State Forestry
Scott Harger, Coconino Natural Resource Conservation District
Bryce Esch, Ecological Restoration Institute, NAU
Anne Mottek, Treasurer, Mottek Consulting
Aaron Green, Secretary, Arizona State Forestry

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