

Increasing Watershed Resilience to Promote Fire Adapted Communities: Summary (1 of 4)

The connection between watershed protection and forest resilience is becoming increasingly clear, as drought and population pressures stress already limited water supplies, and increasing fuels and a changing climate leave forests ripe for severe fire. Every year, municipal watersheds face threats from severe wildfire, including increased sedimentation rates, decreased water quality and storage, and other impacts from landslides and flooding.



Public field tours are an important component of the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project.

Photo by Mark Brehl

Economic studies have demonstrated clear payoffs for proactive forest restoration and fuels reduction in at-risk areas, with every dollar invested in watershed protection saving many times that in post-fire recovery and water treatment costs.

For example, an avoided cost analysis in the upper Mokelumne River watershed in California showed that the costs of severe wildfire there would add up to two or three times the cost of a proactive, landscape-scale fuels reduction strategy. Likewise, the Arizona Rural Policy Institute recently released a cost

An inspiring note of caution

As you embark on this journey, heed the warning of community leaders in Flagstaff, and “be prepared for catastrophic success!” The development and approval of the bond measure in Flagstaff happened very quickly and with impressive support from the community, and though leaders there were well prepared to launch the project, the success of their efforts was nonetheless intimidating. As you develop projects in your community, prepare to work hard and make an enduring commitment, but also prepare for unexpected success to keep you on your toes!

avoidance study for the Flagstaff municipal watershed, and it estimated the total costs of severe wildfire to be somewhere between 500 million and 1.2 billion; this is in stark contrast to the 10 million bond measure that is currently funding a watershed-wide forest restoration and fuels treatment strategy there.

As highlighted by these examples, programs that increase landscape resiliency within municipal watersheds are a sound investment. Thus, the question for many community leaders is not if these types of projects are worthwhile, but rather how to go about initiating, coordinating and funding them.

This series of quick guides provides insights and strategies for spearheading watershed-focused forest restoration and fuels reduction projects, based on efforts in four fire adapted communities in the West. Projects in Ashland, Oregon; Santa Fe, New Mexico; Flagstaff, Arizona; and the Upper South Platte watershed in Colorado provide solid examples of the range of strategies that may be employed to address fire-related threats to municipal water supplies.



From these examples, clear themes emerge with regard to collaborative processes and funding strategies; however, these examples also demonstrate the importance of each community's unique needs and issues in defining a scope of work and a successful implementation strategy.

This series focuses on three key elements of these types of efforts: **Initiating** dialogue and action around issues of forest resilience, fuels reduction, and watershed protection; **Collaborating** on a plan of action and setting the structure for successful partnerships and resource sharing; and determining a **Funding** strategy that works for your community and can meet the demands of the resources at risk.



Looking down on the steep hillsides and dry forests of the upper Flagstaff watershed.

Photo by Mark Brehl

Resources

Information for this series of quick guides was provided by community leaders from collaborative programs throughout the West. To learn more, please use the resources listed below. For more information about the FAC Learning Network, visit the website at www.facnetwork.org or email info@facnetwork.org.

Websites

Ashland Forest Resiliency Project
www.ashlandwatershed.org

Coalition for the Upper South Platte (CUSP)
<http://cusp.ws/>

Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project
<http://www.flagstaffwatershedprotection.org/>
Santa Fe Municipal Watershed Management
http://www.santafenm.gov/upper_watershed

Reports and Documents

Mokelumne watershed avoided cost analysis: Why Sierra fuel treatments make economic sense. 2014. Prepared for the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy, and U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. Sierra Nevada Conservancy. Auburn, California. Online: <http://www.sierranevadaconservancy.ca.gov/mokelumne>.

Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project Cost Avoidance Study. 2014. Prepared for the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project Monitoring Committee by the Arizona Rural Policy Institute. <http://www.flagstaffwatershedprotection.org/fwpp-cost-avoidance-study/>.

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