

2023 Annual Report Deschutes National Forest

OCTOBER 1, 2022 TO SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

The Deschutes National Forest continues to sustain a diverse range of priorities, projects and activities that support and embody the Forest Service's promise of "caring for the land and serving people."

In fiscal year 2023, the Forest struck a delicate balance between protecting Central Oregon's unique landscape and cultural resources while providing opportunities for recreation, increasing the pace and scale of reducing wildfire risk to our communities and rejuvenating the health and vitality of our fire-dependent ecosystem.

Staff continued to build upon a legacy of partnerships and collaboration identifying innovative mechanisms for fostering inclusive opportunities while supporting local communities and industry. The Deschutes National Forest served as a nexus for those passionate about stewarding this landscape into the future.



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Courtesy Photo by Kirk Metzger

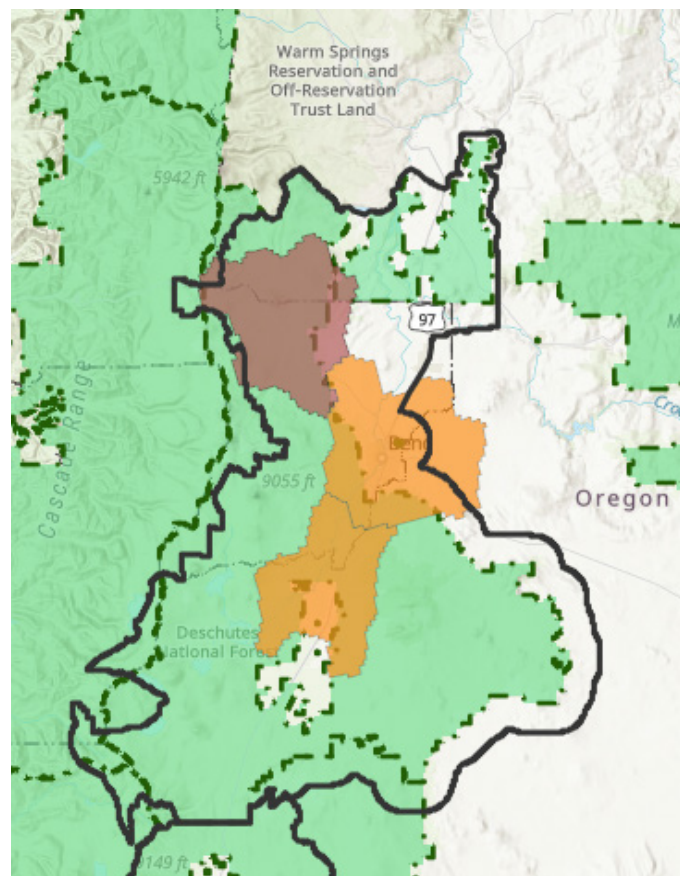
Central Oregon Landscape

WILDFIRE CRISIS STRATEGY

As part of one of 21 focal landscapes under the Forest Service's Wildfire Crisis Strategy, the Deschutes National Forest continues to use targeted investments to increase the pace and scale of reducing wildfire risk to our communities and landscapes.

The Central Oregon Landscape (which includes the majority of the Deschutes National Forest and the Crooked River National Grassland) exceeded fuels reduction targets by 146% using Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act, Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration and Joint Chief's funding. The Deschutes National Forest accomplished 8,950 acres of prescribed fire and 41,504 acres of mechanical fuels reduction, including thinning, mowing and yarding.

During fiscal year 2023, the Deschutes National Forest treated nearly 50,000 acres in high-risk firesheds (shown in red and orange on map to right), including 13,102 acres in the Bend Fireshed, 8,940 in the Sisters Fireshed and 27,876 acres in the Sunriver Fireshed.





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A robust spring prescribed burning season provided opportunities for firefighters to complete keystone operations that reduce wildfire risk to our communities while increasing landscape resiliency.

Bend-Fort Rock Ranger District firefighters completed the remaining 763 acres of prescribed burning within the Ann's Butte units directly adjacent to the River Meadow subdivision in Sunriver. On the Crescent Ranger District, firefighters conducted cross-boundary burning with Oregon Department of Forestry within the Gilchrist State Forest. The Sisters Ranger District implemented multiple operations within the Sisters Area Fuels Reduction units directly adjacent to the community of Sisters.

The Nature Conservancy, in partnership with the Deschutes National Forest, hosted 40 fire practitioners through the Central Oregon Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (Trex). Participants supported implementation of 936 acres of prescribed burning during the two-week program.

SISTERS PRESCRIBED BURN TOUR

In May, the Deschutes National Forest hosted a prescribed burn tour for elected officials, local stakeholders, partners and media on the SAFR (Sisters Area Fuels Reduction) 188 Prescribed Burn just west of Sisters adjacent to Hwy 242 & Edgington Road. The 128-acre prescribed burn unit was located directly adjacent to the Sisters High School and Middle School.

The prescribed burn tour gave participants an opportunity to experience a prescribed burn from the operational briefing through ignitions. The tour increased awareness around Central Oregon's fire-adapted ecosystem, the planning behind the implementation of a prescribed burn and the process used to apply low-intensity fire to the landscape.



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A LANDSCAPE AT WORK

During fiscal year 2023, commercial thinning on the Deschutes National Forest produced 26.2 million board feet totaling over \$1.5 million. Funds are reinvested into the landscape to implement restoration activities such as subsoiling, fuels treatments, improving wildlife habitat and treating invasive species.

Active timber operations occurred in the following project areas: Flat, Kew, Ringo, Rocket, Surveyors, Ursus and West Bend.

For Current & Future Generations

Volunteers remain key to the Deschutes National Forest providing excellent visitor services, dynamic sustainability and conservation education to local youth. Discover Your Forest, the non-profit partner of the forest, spearheads volunteer coordination and oversight.

In 2023, a total of 2,025 volunteers gave 47,630 hours of their time in areas including, interpretation, trail maintenance, fire lookout staffing, trailhead hosting and forest clean-ups.

FOREST STEWARDS

Discover Your Forest and the Deschutes National Forest developed a new volunteer group to serve as a conduit for delivering information related to fuels reduction work, trail etiquette and sustainability and general forest information at popular trailheads adjacent to areas that have or are currently undergoing landscape treatments. In 2023, 14 volunteers signed on to the Forest Stewards program serving at locations including Phil's Trailhead and popular snoparks.

PUBLIC LAND STEWARDS

The Public Land Stewards, an independent organization fiscally sponsored by Discover Your Forest, played a pivotal role in organizing clean-up efforts across the forest. In 2023, during the course of 3,388 volunteer hours they removed 451,540 pounds of trash and vehicles from the Deschutes National Forest.

COLLABORATION & CONNECTIONS

The Deschutes National Forest continued to build upon relationships and collaboration with Discover Your Forest, the Children's Forest of Central Oregon, Deschutes Collaborative Forest Project, Deschutes Trails Coalition and several other key partner organizations.

In June, the Deschutes National Forest along with other adjacent National Forests met with leadership and resource specialists from the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs to discuss issues of on-going importance to the Tribe and Forest Service.



Courtesy Photo by Discover Your Forest



Courtesy Photo by Discover Your Forest



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GROWING THE NEXT GENERATION

The Deschutes National Forest remains dedicated to developing the next generation of land management stewards through career and mentorship opportunities. The Forest, in partnership with Discover Your Forest, hosted five aquatic and four wilderness trainees through the Generation Green program and two “Partners in Service” visitor services staff at the Newberry National Volcanic Monument. Through a partnership with Northwest Youth Corps, the Forest provided six resource assistantships in planning, special uses, archeology and public affairs. For the second year in a row, the Sisters Ranger District hosted a Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities intern in natural resources.

YOUTH CONSERVATION CREWS

The Deschutes National Forest, in partnership with Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council’s Youth Compass Program and Heart of Oregon, hosted nine Central Oregon Youth Conservation Crews across the forest providing jobs for 44 youth and nine crew leaders. Crews worked a combined 15,586 hours on projects including hazardous fuels removal, trail maintenance, reforestation brush control, fence maintenance, invasive plant removal, fireline construction and campground recycling processing.



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Land of Many Uses

Around 5 million people visit the Deschutes National Forest every year in pursuit of enjoying the wide-ranging recreation opportunities found across more than 1.6 million acres. Recreation on the Deschutes National Forest is a backbone of the Central Oregon economy with estimated annual spending of \$223 million, of which approximately \$82 million is associated with trail-based recreation.

Vista Recreation, a campground concessionaire, operates 81 campgrounds on the Deschutes National Forest under a special use permit. During the 2023 camping season, these campgrounds served a total of 308,423 people.



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CENTRAL CASCADES WILDERNESS PERMIT

In 2021, the Deschutes and Willamette National Forests implemented the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System for the Mt. Jefferson, Mt. Washington and Three Sisters Wilderness areas to protect and sustain these treasured landscapes. All overnight stays within the three Wilderness areas require a permit between June 15 and November 15. Nineteen of 79 trailheads require day use permits for the same time frame.

During the 2023 season, a total of 37,100 permits were issued through Recreation.gov, including 10,110 overnight permits and 26,990 day use permits. A total of 110,486 individuals visited the three Wilderness areas through the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System.



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LAVA RIVER CAVE

Over the past several years, Lava River Cave consistently received an average of 70,000 visitors during the operational season from May to mid-September. High-volume visitation often far exceeded designed parking capacity. This meant long wait times and uncertainty for visitors who chose to line-up along the road outside of the cave entrance.

In 2022, the Deschutes National Forest implemented the Lava River Cave Timed Reservation Tickets. Lava River Cave Timed Reservation Tickets improves visitors' safety and experience by providing time slots available for reservation in advance.

During the 2023 season, 40,723 people obtained 12,408 timed reservation tickets through online reservations.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE DAY

The Crescent Ranger District in coordination with Bend-La Pine School District hosted the annual Outdoor Adventure Day for students from Crescent, Gilchrist and La Pine.

In 2023, 739 students participated in the event. Archaeologists, wildlife and fish biologists, firefighters, botanists and recreation specialists staffed educational stations for children to visit and learn about wildlife, fish, plants, cultural resources, outdoor recreation and safety, art, water, fire and recycling.



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FOREST SERVICE ROAD 16 RECONSTRUCTION

During the early summer, the Deschutes National Forest road crew and the Sisters Ranger District completed a much-anticipated road improvement project on Forest Service Road 16, which provides access to the highly popular recreation area at Three Creek Lakes. Over the years, the unpaved portion of the road had degraded to a surface condition that was difficult for vehicles to safely navigate.

Reconstruction work on the non-paved

section of road included reshaping the prism of the road to restore a crown in the road surface.

The restored crown will allow water to properly drain off the road, preventing erosion and loss of surfacing. The Forest road crew also placed new aggregate on the road surface.



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LOWER BLACK BUTTE SWAMP RESTORATION PROJECT

The Sisters Ranger District continued work in 2023 to restore the Lower Black Butte Swamp wetland through the use of beaver dam analogues (BDA), which are human-made beaver dams, the removal of invasive Reed Canary grass and the reintroduction of native sedges. Forest Service staff worked in conjunction with Heart of Oregon, Central Oregon Youth Conservation Corps and Central Oregon Intergovernmental Council crews on BDA construction, invasive weed pulls and native planting. Staff continue to monitor the area and are seeing significant re-wetting and increased wetland health and vitality.

Upstream partners, including the Deschutes Soils and Water Conservation District and Black Butte Ranch, are also supporting restoration by removing Reed Canary grass to improve biodiversity.

BEND SEED EXTRACTORY IMPROVEMENTS



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The Deschutes National Forest received Disaster Relief funding for infrastructure improvements to the Bend Seed Extractory. Facility upgrades included fire detection systems, resurfacing of

outdoor work areas and upgrades to the dust collection system.

SISTERS RANGER STATION CONSTRUCTION

In September 2023, the building contract for the new Sisters Ranger Station was awarded. The new ranger station will replace the current one built in 1962. The new space will be designed for a 21st century workforce that requires increased connectivity and technology to accomplish the Forest Service's mission. The Sisters Ranger Station is complimented by the recently finished Sisters District Warehouse.

Wildfire Response

Firefighters in Central Oregon provided timely and successful response to 111 fire starts on the Deschutes National Forest in 2023, for a total of 44 acres. Of these, firefighters determined 81 fires to be caused by humans or an undetermined cause with 30 started by lightning.

The Redmond Air Center supported national and international firefighting operations, including cache supplies for 15 Type 1 and 2 Incidents, 187 smokejumper fire jumps, 288 loads of retardant and mobilization of crews and resources to Alaska, Canada and the continental United States.