

# R-5 Pacific Southwest Region Story



Giant sequoias are among the most impressive sights in California's national forests.

The forests in the Pacific Southwest Region of the U.S. Forest Service play an essential role in our lives and our communities. We manage more than 20 million acres of forests and grasslands across California, while partnering in forest management on state and private forest lands in California, Hawai'i and the U.S. Affiliated Pacific Islands. Our goal is to retain and restore ecological resilience on national forests to achieve sustainable ecosystems and that also provide a broad range of services to people. These include basic goods, such as water, wood, and energy, but also important benefits such as clean air and water purification, flood and climate regulation, carbon sequestration and storage, biodiversity, fish and wildlife habitat, scenic landscapes, recreational opportunities, and many others. In California alone, our forests and grasslands serve and sustain more than 23 million annual visitors and 38 million California residents.

## Key Resources Flow from National Forests

The value of water flowing from national forest system lands has become increasingly important, especially where severe drought continues. More than half the state water supply flows from national forest system lands at an annual worth of nearly \$9.5 billion. This water helps support a thriving agricultural economy that generates more than \$38 billion annually. Resi-

dents in towns and cities also benefit from national forest system lands, as downstream users receive clean water from our upper watersheds. In addition, hydroelectric power plants on California's national forest system lands produce more than 11,000 Megawatts of electricity per year, enough to meet the power needs of 11 million homes. In Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands, forests capture rain that becomes drinking water for island inhabitants. Deforestation of the Ko'olau Mountains there would result in a loss to aquifers for \$4.6 to \$8.5 billion.



Open space in Moloka'i, Hawai'i. Public and private lands in Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands are supported and protected by the Forest Service and its partners.

Throughout the Pacific Southwest Region, forests support local economies and residents in numerous ways. For example, wood products generated \$215 million from lumber and electricity produced from national forests in California. In addition, local governments receive 25 percent of all revenues generated on the national forests to support county roads and schools. Recreation opportunities also provide support for local economies, as approximately 38,000 jobs in the outdoor recreation industry are supported from recreation on the national forests. The importance of our national forests also extends to the great cultural and spiritual significance they hold. For example, national forests in the region include ancient fire pits where Native Americans have gathered for 12,000 years, and numerous sacred sites can be found throughout Hawai'i and the Pacific Islands.

### Our National Forests are at Risk

National forests and grasslands provide life-sustaining, valuable public resources that are under threat. Catastrophic wildfires, climate and weather pattern changes, disease and insect infestations, and the conversion of open spaces to other uses place our lands in danger. Over the last decade, an average of over 400,000 acres burned annually in California. The 2013 Rim Fire burned more than 257,000 acres and was the third largest fire on record in the state. The Forest Service still spent \$509 million suppressing fires in 2015, despite suppressing 98% of fires on initial attack. The majority of funds were spent on the two percent of high severity fires that escaped initial attack.



To respond to these challenges on our national forests, we are shifting away from the concept of production targets, and moving to a more value-based effort. We

focus on outcomes of our management activities, rather than outputs. We must be collaborative and cooperative with our various communities, users and interest groups to meet the increasing needs of the American people, while balancing our limited resources. This includes serving as conveners and facilitators, helping frame questions and solutions with our partners and the public, and becoming a learning organization that shares ideas and knowledge with our communities.

### More Needs to be Done

While the Forest Service is working to increase its pace and scale of ecological restoration, we estimate that six to nine million acres of national forest lands in California still need restoration treatment. This includes thinning, prescribed burning, removal of invasive species, and post-fire restoration. The goal is to increase resilience to wildfire, climate change, invasive species and human population growth. At the present rate of treating 200,000 acres per year, it would take 30 to 45 years to fully restore the national forests. Current and future partnerships with federal, state, local and tribal governments, as well as special interest groups, are crucial to increasing our restoration efforts to more than double the acres we restore every year. With an increase of \$300 million in restoration investment per year, we have the potential to reduce annual fire suppression costs by \$800 million while protecting billions of dollars in natural resources.

Partnerships are essential to increasing the pace and scale of our restoration and threats to our resources. In 2014, we spent \$450 million on the management of national forests in California. An additional \$17 million was spent to improve and maintain urban and rural forests and to sustain local wildland firefighting capacity in California, the Pacific Islands and other private and local government entities.

Partnerships played a significant role in accomplishing this work and matched Forest Service funds by more than \$12 million. Only through the critical stewardship of our interested public will we be able to truly maintain, protect, and restore the critical resources and benefits derived from our nation's Forests