

USDA Forest Service

Field Guide to Partners



# Field Guide to Partners

**Chapter 3 DRAFT**

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## 3. Field Guide to Partners

USDA Forest Service partners play a significant role in managing the nation's forests and grasslands.

**The collaborative nature of partnerships in managing the nation's forests and grasslands builds commitment and ownership of results.** Strategic investments in partner-focused efforts allow the agency to accomplish more across broad landscapes and through broader constituencies than would otherwise be possible. Partners have a huge part in seeing that valuable public lands and nearby acres are cared for to ensure their healthy existence for future generations. On-the-ground, community-based projects and partnerships play a critical role.

### 3.1 Partnering Roles

The USDA Forest Service's role in bringing people together to jointly manage our nation's forests and grasslands has opened doors to many unique partnerships that have helped build capacity while expanding community outreach. The agency accomplishes much of its work through collaboration with a diversity of private, non-profit, and government partners, leveraging significant energy and support towards critical USFS mission activities.

This chapter explores partner groups and special partner relationships that include interpretive associations, friends groups, non-profit organizations, Tribes, inter-Tribal organizations, counties, conservation districts, and State forestry agencies. Other partner categories from both private and public sectors include city councils, civic groups, conservation groups, individuals, military bases whose lands abut National Forest System (NFS) lands, other Federal agencies, and universities, to

name a few. Because Forest Service partners often partner with others, those entities become Forest Service partners by extension, such as when a nonprofit reaches out to a local business to become involved in a stewardship project near their location. The network of relationships among and between the Forest Service, its partners, and its partners' partners grows. Existing partnerships of all types serve as references for new partnerships.

Three partners—the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the National Forest Foundation, and the National Environmental Education Foundation—are in a category by themselves because they were established by Congress and, through their Congressional charter, given special authorities.

### ← 3.2 Nonprofit Characteristics and Operations

Nonprofits can be local, regional, national, and/or international in geographic focus. They can be organized around and accountable to communities, like-minded peers, members, or volunteers. Some are established to implement specific projects while others focus on education, policy, research, or other goals. Others are established to tackle short-term needs projects while others focus on conservation, education, policy, research, or other goals. Nonprofits can be private foundations or public charities, while others are universities or small local organizations. The hundreds of different nonprofit organization types exist for as many different reasons, but their existence is always for the public good.



As the Forest Service’s major non-governmental partners, nonprofit partnering relationships are enhanced when both parties understand how the other operates. Nonprofits and other partners can gain insight into the Forest Service by reading [chapter 1](#) and [chapter 2](#) of this guide. Forest Service staffs partner best with nonprofits when recognizing that these entities must follow nonprofit regulations and often rely heavily on board members and volunteers.

### 3.2.1 Financial Status and Fundraising

Nonprofits are often referred to by their Federal tax-exempt designation, the most common of which is section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, but other nonprofit designations exist with corresponding numerical and legal designations. By applying to the Internal Revenue Service, nonprofits can receive the proper tax-exempt designation that allows contributors to claim Federal tax deductions. In addition, organizations wishing to incorporate as a nonprofit must register with a State.

Nonprofits are accountable to their boards, communities, members, peers, and volunteers.

Nonprofits do not operate for the financial benefit of individuals, making members stakeholders rather than stockholders. Although it is legal for these organizations to make a profit, all funds must be channeled back into implementing their mission.



### 3.2.2 Governance

Forest Service employees working with any nonprofit can function best in that relationship if they understand the organization’s structure and identify their main contact. In some cases, that main contact may be the executive director or even a group of people,

such as a board of directors. Involvement of Forest Service employees in nonprofits—particularly in leadership positions—must be guided by conduct and [ethics rules](#).

### 3.2.2.1 Board Members and Their Roles

While the practice is not universal, the vast majority of nonprofits are governed by a volunteer board of directors. The board of directors is fiscally and legally responsible for the organization, playing a prominent role in establishing and adhering to an organization's vision and priorities, approving annual budgets and major expenses and fundraising, and conducting strategic planning. If the nonprofit's organizational structure calls for one, the board also selects and evaluates the executive director or president, who may or may not be paid.

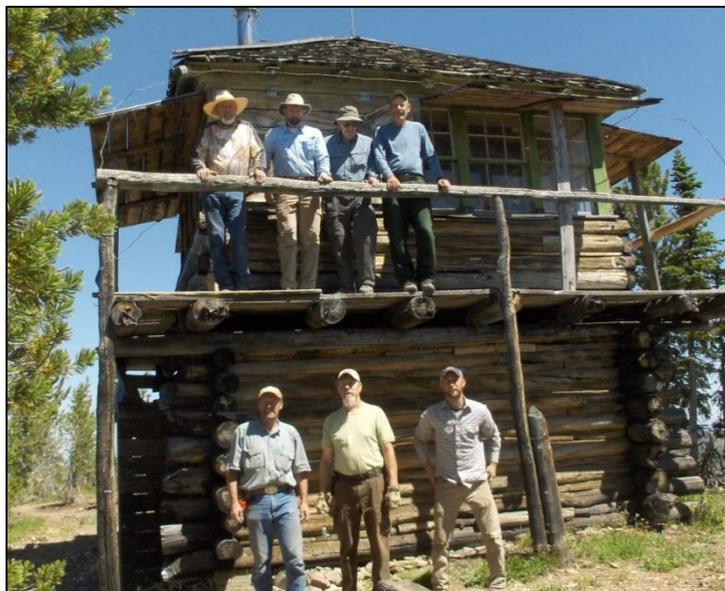
Effective board members bring their unique expertise and skills, demonstrate credibility, and represent members' interests. A board member's personal network of connections can often support additional funding and resource development opportunities. Board members should have no conflict of interest and no opportunity for personal financial gain through their affiliation with the organization.

### 3.2.2.2 Operational Structures

In some cases, an executive director or president is responsible for the organization's day-to-day operations, including hiring and managing any staff. Some nonprofits have no paid staff. Others might have a part-time staff person. Still others might have multiple full-time staff members. An organization's size and financial position often dictate its operational arrangement.

### 3.2.3 Fund Sources

Although many accomplish a lot through volunteers, nonprofits often raise money through donations, grants, or fees for services or goods. Nonprofit funds come from many sources: business and individual donations, endowments, foundation awards and grants, fundraising events, and sales income. Many small nonprofits have minor operating reserves and exist from project-to-project. Capacity issues are often a challenge for nonprofits because of uneven revenue flows that sometimes affect their ability to effectively partner.



## ← 3.3 Nonprofit Organizational Best Practices

Nonprofits who are successful partners usually have the following attributes:

### 3.3.1 Organization

- Clearly articulated mission, values, and vision
- Finely honed bylaws, operational policies, and procedures that are reviewed for adherence and updated as necessary
- Well-defined staff roles involving highly trained and impassioned workers

- Well-established board of directors whose members are passionate for the organization's mission with high board member-meeting participation

### 3.3.2 Operational Maxims

- Board membership term limits in place
- Effective external and internal communication
- Focused activities and programs to carry out the organization's mission
- Openly made and well-documented decisions
- Sound financial planning and management policies and practices with appropriate operating reserves
- Strong adherence to well-documented Federal and State reporting requirements

## 3.4 Nonprofit Relationship Benefits

In general, Forest Service-nonprofit alliances provide the following benefits:

- Bridged differences between the Forest Service and diverse entities
- Community outreach that increases the breadth and depth of Forest Service relationships
- Greater awareness of forest issues and opportunities among local individuals, leaders, and organizations
- Increased local cultural awareness among Forest Service staff
- Informed and positive relations with nearby communities
- Long-term alliances and sustainable collaboration
- More programs that result in grants, jobs, and extra local capacity
- Identification of areas of mutual interest where both the Forest Service and partners can achieve their respective missions and goals

### ← 3.5 The National Forest Foundation

The National Forest Foundation (NFF) is solely focused on addressing the challenges that face America's national forests and grasslands. The NFF stands apart from similar organizations through its commitment to facilitating local involvement and encouraging grassroots participation in public lands stewardship. In addition, the Forest Service can provide up to \$3 million yearly to the NFF to aid conservation partnership projects in support of the Forest Service mission for projects on or benefitting NFS lands or related to Forest Service programs. The NFF is required to match these Federal dollars with private contributions on at least a one-for-one basis.



### 3.5.1 Purpose and Organizational Structure

Founded by Congressional charter in 1991, the NFF engages America in community-based and nationwide programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of all 193 million acres of NFS land. The NFF accepts and administers funds and land gifts and also provides financial and technical support to facilitate community-based conservation benefiting the NFS.

The NFF understands that communities need to play an active role in the future of forested landscapes, the same landscapes that offer communities many ecological, economic, and social benefits. By bringing together communities, private partners, and individuals, the NFF leverages knowledge, funding, and citizen commitment to revitalize thousands of acres of forests and watersheds. The NFF empowers communities to care for these local resources by working through a combination of grant programs, direct restoration initiatives, and technical assistance. The NFF believes that forest and watershed stewardship should span ownership and political boundaries to protect clean water, quality outdoor experience, wildlife habitat and more.

NFF staff work closely with the Forest Service, conservation nonprofits, businesses, and foundations across the country to provide resources and support for on-the-ground restoration work, collaborative initiatives, and volunteer opportunities. In addition to its headquarters office in Montana, the NFF has six field offices (two in California and one each in Colorado, Oregon, Washington State, and Washington, DC) where NFF staff support regional conservation and restoration efforts. The NFF's board of directors includes 26 experienced members who operate in concert with this president-led staff and 17 National Forest Leadership Council members.

### 3.5.2 Accomplishments

Since 2001, through the help of its many partners, the NFF has supported nearly 1,400 completed projects by leveraging over \$33 million in Federal funds with over \$101 million in non-Federal and grantee matching funds, totaling more than \$134 million for on-the-ground conservation work

involving 521 nonprofit organizations. Specific accomplishments reported through August 2014 include:

- 1,548 Projects Completed
- 10,513 Miles of Trail Completed
- 517,459 Acres of Fuel Reduction Completed or Planned
- 4,364,563 Trees and Shrubs Planted
- 81,114 Acres of Noxious Weed Treated
- 3,310 Miles of Stream Surveyed or Restored
- 117,253 Acres of Wildlife Habitat Restored or Maintained
- 46,013 Youth Employed or Engaged
- 6,530 Additional Organizations Involved
- 120,247 Volunteers Engaged through 1,524,230 Volunteer Hours



### 3.5.3 Grant Programs

The NFF provides financial support to partner organizations through a suite of grant programs. These programs are designed to involve a variety of stakeholders in forest stewardship and aim to leverage additional skills and support, thereby benefitting a wide array of communities and landscapes. Through on-the-ground conservation and capacity-building programs, the NFF offers grants and technical assistance to support benefits to national forests and grasslands and advance local collaborative efforts. More information on these programs is available on the [NFF website](#).

### 3.5.3.1 On-the-Ground Grant Programs

Grants to nonprofit organizations are designed to ensure that critical conservation and restoration needs are met, helping implement projects that directly benefit NFS lands

The Matching Awards Program is the NFF's flagship awards program, offering challenge grants to nonprofits to complete on-the-ground conservation and citizen-based monitoring projects that benefit national forests and grasslands. The NFF encourages organizations to position their proposed projects within at least one of NFF's areas of programmatic emphasis, each of which are given equal priority. These areas are Wildlife Habitat Improvement, Recreation, Watershed Health and Restoration, and Community-Based Forestry. There are normally two application cycles per year, with application packages typically due in January and July. All matching grant proposals and awards require at least a 1:1 cash match of non-Federal funds.

The Ski Conservation Fund and the Forest Stewardship Fund are unique partnerships with ski areas, lodges and campground operators. Visitors to these businesses on or near national forest lands can make contributions to support conservation and restoration projects on those lands. The NFF awards the collected funds to local nonprofit organization who implement the projects.

### 3.5.3.2 Capacity-Building Grant Programs

Building the capacity of organizations working on and around Forest Service lands and assisting with the collaborative process between diverse stakeholders is a valuable part of the NFF's work. The NFF has offered peer mentor relationships for growing organizations as well as technical support to empower various groups. The Community Capacity and Land Stewardship Program is a grant program that has supported local collaborative watershed restoration efforts within southeast Alaska, California, Oregon and Washington State since 2011.

### 3.5.3.3 The Barrett Foundation Business Concept Challenge Grant Program

The Barrett Foundation Business Concept Challenge makes \$100,000 available annually for (1) innovative market-based solutions to natural resource issues benefitting national forests and grasslands and (2) to stimulate creative thinking to address problems and identify opportunities that benefit the national forests and grasslands.



### 3.5.4 Programs and Initiatives

Rooted in the NFF's mission and values are programs that blend knowledge, community engagement, and conservation actions to ensure vibrant futures for the national forests and grasslands.

### 3.5.4.1 Treasured Landscapes – Unforgettable Experiences

The NFF is leading a national conservation campaign called *Treasured Landscapes – Unforgettable Experiences*, taking place on 14 national forests and grasslands across the nation. *Treasured Landscapes* projects are located on the Angeles, Coconino, Deschutes, Idaho Panhandle, Ocala, Okanogan-Wenatchee, Ozark, Pike, Tahoe, Tongass, Uinta-Wasatch-Cache, White Mountain, and White River national forests and the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. This site-based work is targeting critical conservation needs in areas of high ecological value while also helping raise community awareness of the many values of national forests. More information on this campaign can be found on the [NFF website](#).

Overarching *Treasured Landscapes* goals are as follows:

- To help the American public fully understand, savor, and appreciate all that our national forests have to offer while building lasting connections with the lands that give clean air and water, diversity of life, and fulfilling outdoor recreation opportunities.
- To implement stewardship projects that nurture resilience for vast ecosystems.
- To invest in the strength of communities of interest and place, helping people convert their passion for forests into meaningful and sustainable conservation actions.
- To restore landscapes damaged by disease, insects, natural disasters, and wildfire to provide carbon sequestration, scenic, watershed, and wildlife benefits.

### 3.5.4.2 Conservation Connect

The [Conservation Connect](#) learning network for collaboration complements the NFF's grant programs by offering technical assistance in the form of web-based peer learning sessions, documentation of best practices and tools, peer mentoring, and direct facilitation of collaborative groups. Conservation Connect serves community-based groups and Forest Service employees involved in collaborative stewardship on NFS lands. Conservation Connect's objectives are to:

- Build collaborative groups' organizational capacity.
- Foster peer-to-peer and community-to-agency connections.
- Identify common challenges, support knowledge exchange, and work toward team problem-solving.
- Promote new understanding around the ecological, economic, and social objectives of collaborative forest stewardship.

### 3.5.4.3 Tree Planting

The [NFF's tree-planting program](#) includes opportunities for individuals, businesses, and others such as community and school groups to help reforest lands affected by disease and insect outbreaks, past land uses, significant weather events, and wildfire. Since 2007, the program has helped plant more than 4 million trees around the nation.



### 3.5.4.4 Carbon Capital Fund

The Carbon Capital Fund educates the public about how forests ameliorate climate change impacts and what people can do to reduce their carbon footprint. The NFF also invests in projects that sequester carbon on national forests by reforesting areas damaged by disease, wildfire, insects, or other natural effects. A third party scientifically verifies these projects' carbon offsets.

More specifically, the Carbon Capital Fund program allows people to compute their annual carbon footprint, the amount of carbon dioxide that daily activities release into the atmosphere through

fossil fuel combustion. The cost of that use can be computed on the [NFF website](#), and people have an opportunity to donate that amount—or any amount—to support tree-planting projects in naturally deforested areas to help sequester carbon.

#### **3.5.4.5 Public Engagement and Friends of the Forest**

In an effort to build a growing constituency of people to support the national forests and grasslands, the NFF conducts education, public outreach, and volunteer activities. The [Friends of the Forest program](#) helps people learn about national forest and grassland issues and values through hands-on stewardship events, a monthly electronic newsletter, a Facebook page, other social media, and publications.

#### **3.5.5 Contacts and More Information**

The [NFF website](#) has extensive information on the organization, including its contact details. The website also offers an in-depth look into the NFF's many programs and opportunities designed to foster its core values: uniting diverse interests and communities in collaborative stewardship designed to restore ecosystems to their natural resiliency and function through on-the-ground conservation.

## ← 3.6 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) sustains, restores and enhances the Nation’s fish, wildlife, plants and habitats by directing public conservation dollars to pressing environmental needs and matching those investments with private funds

### 3.6.1 Purpose and Organizational Structure

Established by Congress as an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 1984, NFWF was provided with the broad mission of assisting Federal agencies in the management of our Nation’s fish, wildlife and plant resources through leveraging Federal conservation dollars with private contributions. The Forest Service can provide up to \$3 million annually to NFWF to support cost-share conservation projects on or benefitting NFS lands or related to Forest Service program. Such funds must be matched on at least a one-for-one basis by NFWF or its sub-recipients.



Sitting at the nexus of private and public communities, NFWF has partnered with 25 Federal agencies, numerous State and local agencies, significant industry and nonprofit leaders, and concerned citizens. NFWF’s current Federal partnerships include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Defense (DOD), and many others. NFWF works closely with the Forest Service and

other Federal agencies by partnering broadly to identify and direct funding to the highest priority conservation challenges.

NFWF's Board of Directors includes 28 White House-confirmed members, as well as the Director of the FWS and NOAA's administrator. NFWF has 100 professional staff members primarily based out of NFWF's headquarters located in Washington, DC, with additional offices located in Portland, Oregon; San Francisco, California; and St. Paul, Minnesota. NFWF's Federal partners, including the Forest Service, identify worthy projects for funding consideration, help assess project proposals, work to secure funds for grant programs, and conduct project site visits and evaluate project success.

### 3.6.2 Accomplishments

Since 1984, NFWF has supported more than 12,000 projects by leveraging over \$619 million in Federal funds with over \$1.5 billion in non-Federal and grantee matching funds. This totals more than \$2.1 billion for on-the-ground conservation work.

NFWF grants have been made to more than 125 national forests and grasslands and research stations across all Forest Service geographical regions. As recorded through early 2013, a total of 1,229 projects directly benefitting the Forest Service had been supported through NFWF-Forest Service partnerships, bringing more than \$251 million to priority resource management work. These projects have focused on improving watershed health through forest ecosystem restoration that ultimately provides for improved water quality and enhanced fish and wildlife habitat on Forest Service and adjacent private lands. Additional details include:

- Of the 1,229 total projects funded in partnership with Forest Service funds, 214 projects were awarded to Forest Service units. This represents 17% of all projects funded through NFWF-Forest Service agreements. Through these 214 projects, over \$4 million were

provided directly to the Forest Service. NFWF leveraged these \$4 million into a total of more than \$14 million for on-the-ground conservation.

- NFWF awarded an additional 72 projects to the Forest Service funded entirely with other Federal and non-Federal dollars totaling more than \$3.9 million.
- NFWF has also awarded over \$6.6 million in other NFWF Federal and non-Federal funds to non-Forest Service entities to support nearly 60 projects that directly benefit the NFS or a Forest Service program.

### 3.6.3 Grant Opportunities

As of 2012, the NFWF has awarded more than 12,000 conservation grants to more than 4,000 organizations.

Nonprofit organizations—as well as national forests and grasslands themselves—are eligible to apply for NFWF grants through online application processes.

Applicants are most successful when they discuss a project proposal with NFWF staff in advance to determine the most appropriate funding source. New programs are added on a regular basis and potential grantees should check the [website](#) on a monthly basis.



#### 3.6.3.1 Keystone Initiative Grants

NFWF helps fund projects related to the Forest Service mission through its Keystone Initiatives, which have replaced the older General Conservation grant programs. These multi-year initiatives seek to achieve measurable conservation outcomes over a five- to ten-year period. Each of the

four initiatives claims specific goals and multiple-grant programs focused on particular locations: bird and habitat conservation, freshwater fish and habitat conservation, marine and coastal conservation, and wildlife and landscape habitat conservation.

Specific goals, strategies, and outcomes are identified for each Initiative. These metrics are used to create a Business Plan which guides NFWF's project investment decisions. The business plans are continuously evaluated and refined as the Initiative evolves. Keystone Initiatives are selected by NFWF's Board of Directors after significant consultation with its Federal agency partners.

Two grant cycles take place annually. [More information](#) is available online or by calling 202-857-0166 to contact a Keystone director.

### 3.6.3.2 Other Grant Programs and Funding Opportunities

NFWF advances conservation through a variety of grant programs, both thematically and geographically based. These programs represent innovative partnerships between the public and private sectors to improve environmental stewardship, protect and manage critical habitats, develop innovative solutions to conservation challenges, and support vulnerable species and ecosystems. NFWF offers programs that address specific conservation needs, often in restricted geographic areas, through its partnerships with several Federal agencies, corporations, and others to increase conservation funding. Each program offers its own application deadline. Specific offerings are located on the [NFWF website](#). A sampling of programs includes:

- [Bring Back the Natives](#) program supports on-the-ground watershed restoration and native fish projects performed in partnership with Federal and State agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local landowners.
- [Developing the Next Generation of Conservationists](#) program was launched in December 2011 as a partnership between NFWF, BLM, and the Forest Service. Its goal is to support organizations that are developing innovative conservation job opportunities for youth, those that expose young people, particularly urban and minority youth, to the natural world and

careers available in conservation. The program is continuing to expand as part of the broader 21<sup>st</sup> Century Conservation Services Corps (21CSC) program.

- [Pulling Together Initiative](#) provides support for high quality projects that engage private and public landholders in funding and executing invasive and noxious plant projects, including detection, survey, and control of invasive and noxious plants.
- [Longleaf Stewardship Fund](#) program builds on a decade of investment to restore vanishing longleaf pine forests in the southeastern United States. NFWF established the program as a landmark public-private partnership between the Forest Service DOD, FWS, NRCS, Southern Company, and others. The overarching goal of the Longleaf Stewardship Fund is to restore the longleaf pine ecosystem through collaborative and results-oriented actions.
- Urban Watershed Revitalization Fund was established by NFWF in partnership with the Forest Service to preserve, protect and restore America's great urban waters. Funding is being managed through the [Five Star – Urban Waters](#) program, a unique public-private partnership, that invests in urban watershed conservation efforts.
- [Appalachian Forest Renewal](#) program is a partnership between NFWF and the Forest Service to focus on ecological restoration of denuded or abandoned mine lands throughout Appalachia. The program is using the best science to prioritize and implement restoration of early successional and other forest habitats for targeted migratory bird species, restoring water quality and improving Appalachian fisheries.
- Restoring Alaska's Tongass National Forest for Salmon is a joint initiative between NFWF, the Forest Service, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to support salmon habitat restoration in the Tongass National Forest. NFWF is supporting restoration projects in the top two priority watersheds identified by the Forest Service and partners—Big Stoney and Big Thorne Creeks.

NFWF urges potential applicants to review the online alphabetical list to determine which program(s) may be appropriate and contact either the NFWF staff person listed for each program or the regional partnership office for additional information.

### 3.6.4 Contacts and More Information

The [NFWF website](#) offers extensive information on NFWF as well as its many programs and opportunities to partner to help enhance, protect, and restore the nation’s fish, wildlife, plants, and habitats. [Contact information](#) is also located on the website.



### ← 3.7 American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Governments

American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal governments, nongovernmental Tribal and inter-Tribal organizations, Tribal education institutions, and Tribal business enterprises all partner with the Forest Service in a wide range of areas and, as sovereign governments, Federally-recognized Indian Tribes have a unique government-to-government relationship with the Forest Service. Partnership focal areas often include biomass utilization, climate change mitigation and education, forest health protection, forest restoration, community forestry, heritage, economic development, renewable energy, ecosystem restoration, and small business timber sales.

In addition to working with Forest Service Tribal Relations staff on NFS lands around the Nation, Tribes engage with other Forest Service deputy areas—Research and Development and State and Private Forestry—to connect natural resource management programs to rural and urban communities. See [chapter 2](#) for more information.

### 3.7.1 Tribal Treaties and Their Impacts

The Federal government obtained the vast majority of public domain land in the lower 48 States by signing treaties with Tribes, both Federally recognized and non-Federally recognized. Several Tribes have treaties that contain some rights to off-reservation lands and resources, including fishing, gathering, grazing, hunting, and water on NFS lands. To many Tribes, community identity and survival depend on continued national forest access and use of significant landscapes containing fundamental resources.

In fulfillment of its legally-mandated trust responsibility and within the scope of Congressional authority, the Forest Service strives to work with Tribes so that they can hold ceremonies, gather, hunt, and exercise other reserved rights on national forest lands.

### 3.7.2 Tribal Ownership Facts

Five hundred sixty six Federally-recognized Indian Tribes own more than 94 million acres nationwide, much of which borders Forest Service land:

- Almost 18 million acres of forestland are located on Indian reservations in the United States.
- These lands include 7.7 million acres of commercial timber land or about one percent of the nation's total commercial forest land.
- Excluding Alaska, 43 million acres or 77 percent of all Tribal land is grasslands.
- Almost five percent of all United States lands are Tribal lands.

### 3.7.3 Tribal Partnership Benefits

While the Federal government has trust responsibilities that rely on government-to-government consultation with American Indian and Alaska Native Tribes (outlined in [chapter 2](#)), both entities benefit from non-mandated partnering activities as well.

- Forest Service-Tribal relationships help increase the Forest Service's ability to be responsive to affiliated and local community needs and interests.
- Partnerships improve the Forest Service's sensitivity to traditional American Indian and Alaska Native religious beliefs and practices.
- The Forest Service and Tribes recognize that there are mutual benefits in partnering to manage for healthy and sustainable ecosystems.
- Tribal partnerships help integrate traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and practices into agency land management.



### 3.7.4 Tribal Partnership Guidelines

Concepts for fostering and maintaining successful Forest Service-Tribal efforts are:

- Consider meeting with Tribes separately from the general public.
- Determine how a proposed activity will benefit the Tribe. Oftentimes a project may benefit a Tribe which lacks the resources to participate.
- Determine if the partnership will involve TEK and practices.
- Be prepared to clarify how sensitive Tribal data will be handled and protected (See [Farm Bill Sec. 8106 Prohibition on Disclosure](#))
- Explore the [Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations website](#) to learn more about available tools and training as well as guidelines and policies.

The Office of Tribal Relations recently completed a [new publication](#) titled, “Start a Partnership With the USDA Forest Service or Obtain a Federal Financial Assistance Grant: A Guide for Tribal Governments.” It was prepared to provide the Office of Tribal Relations’ tribal counterparts with a better understanding of how best to work in partnership with the Forest Service.

### 3.7.5 Tribal Forest Protection Act

The Tribal Forest Protection Act (Public Law 108-278) was passed in July 2004 in response to devastating wildfires that had crossed from Federal onto Tribal lands. While Federal agencies are free to work with Tribal entities through the many mechanisms available to all partners, the Tribal Forest Protection Act is a unique tool for Tribes to propose work and enter into agreements with the Forest Service or Bureau of Land Management, work designed to reduce wildfire threats from Federal lands adjacent to Indian trust land and Indian communities. These two agencies may use a variety of agreement instruments, if applicable, except grants. More information on this act as well as other policies is available on the [Office of Tribal Relations Web site](#). [Chapter 6](#) in this guide offers more information concerning contracts.

### 3.7.6 Significant Tribal Partner Organizations

Several key Tribal partner organizations support Forest Service and Tribal land management efforts:

- [Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians](#)
- [American Indian Higher Education Consortium](#)
- [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#)
- [Indian Nations Conservation Alliance](#)
- [Intertribal Timber Council](#)
- [Intertribal Agriculture Council](#)
- [National Congress of American Indians](#)
- [Our Natural Resources](#)
- [Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian](#)
- [Society of American Indian Government Employees](#)
- [United South and Eastern Tribes, Inc.](#)

### ← 3.8 Interpretive Associations

The Forest Service works with more than 50 interpretive association partners nationwide. Alternatively called cooperating associations, these nonprofits have been an important partnership category to the Forest Service for over a quarter of a century. Interpretive associations primarily function to help Forest Service visitors better understand an area's historical significance and available recreational opportunities. While most



operate locally within a single national forest or grassland, others may function in several regions or on multiple units as well as with other government agencies. More recently, Congress granted the Forest Service the legal authority to work with other NGOs and governments (including Federal, tribal, state, and local) through what had previously been solely interpretive association authorities.

### 3.8.1 Interpretive Association Authorities

The [Cooperative Funds and Deposit Act of 1975 \(Public Law 94-148\)](#) provides the fundamental legal authority for the Forest Service to work with interpretive associations. The [Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014 \(House Resolution 3547\)](#) amended the Cooperative Funds and Deposit Act of 1975 to: (1) allow the Forest Service to engage with a broader range of partners, including other governments and NGOs and (2) clarify what specific activities are allowable through these relationships. Finally, the [Consolidated Appropriations Act signed in December 2007 \(Division F, Title IV, Section 417\)](#) authorizes Participating Agreements as the legal operational instrument.

### 3.8.2 Interpretive Association Activities

Interpretive associations and those organizations operating through interpretive association authorities empower visitors by ensuring they have the information and other necessities needed for their enjoyment and appreciation of public lands. Interpretive association activities often include the following:

- Developing and publishing environmental education and forest history materials, including guides, maps, and signs
- Selling health, safety, and convenience items
- Providing information services and conducting educational programs and field institutes
- Raising funds to support Forest Service educational efforts

### 3.8.2.1 Interpretive Association Contributions

Interpretive associations contribute both tangible or intangible goods and services back to the Forest Service annually. These contributions can be in the form of cash, equipment, in-kind service, or supplies in keeping with the association's purpose while remembering the ultimate beneficiary is the public.

### 3.8.3 Interpretive Association Management

Within the Forest Service, interpretive association program coordination and oversight takes place at the National, regional, and forest level. Forest Service Regional Office employees serve as a liaison between the agency and interpretive associations in each region. That person's role involves helping establish new interpretive association agreements, renewing existing agreements, and resolving any operational or management concerns. If a national forest or grassland has a visitor center with an active interpretive association, the visitor center director typically works directly with the interpretive association's director and staff to coordinate and handle day-to-day operations such as selecting sales items and determining funded activities. In the Washington Office, the interpretive services program manager within the Recreation, Heritage and Volunteer Resources staff supports national activities and works with the [Association of Partners for Public Land \(APPL\)](#), which is the national membership organization for Interpretive and Cooperating Associations. The APPL annual conference and trade show aims to build and sustain respect and understanding of the Federal agencies' and interpretive associations' missions and operations.

Forest Service employees may help interpretive associations by handling association funds, inventories, and materials as an incidental part of their official work. The local line officer, interpretive association liaison, and interpretive association representative will determine such actions on a case-by-case basis. Interpretive association funds may not be co-mingled with Forest Service funds.

It's important for Forest Service employees and interpretive associations to meet at least once a year to establish the following year's annual operating plan as well as to conduct an after action review of the past year, including sharing financial information and determining what mutual benefit projects will be accomplished per legal instrument. [Forest Service Manual 2390](#) offers more direction on interpretive association management.

## ← 3.9 Conservation Districts and Counties

### 3.9.1 Conservation Districts

Located in almost every county in the Nation, conservation districts are local units of government established under State law. They play an important role by helping communities carry out natural resource management programs and address natural resource interests from a local perspective and with a community's shared sense of priorities. They help conserve local natural resources by coordinating resources from all available sources to develop local-driven solutions for an area's natural resource concerns. Across the Nation, nearly 3,000 conservation districts serve millions of district residents. In addition, working with the Intertribal Agricultural Council and Indian Nations Conservation Alliance, the [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) has helped establish 33 Tribal Conservation Districts.



Conservation districts may also be referred to as land conservation districts, natural resource districts, resource conservation districts, or soil and water conservation districts.

### 3.9.1.1 Partnering Goals

Conservation districts partner with landowners, operators, and other resource decision makers including the Forest Service to develop and use conservation measures. They undertake their efforts for a variety of purposes:

- To conserve and restore wetlands and other aquatic and wildlife habitats
- To help both rural and urban communities control soil erosion and manage trees
- To help farmers and ranchers concerning grassland conservation
- To protect ground water resources, soil productivity, and water quality
- To safeguard and improve air quality
- To support conservation education

### 3.9.1.2 Affiliations

The [National Association of Conservation Districts](#) provides a collective voice for its individual members to participate in the [Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative](#), the [Public Lands Council](#), and other National conferences and programs. In addition, the association works closely with Forest Service State and Private Forestry natural resource management programs while helping influence National conservation funding legislation, policies, and priorities.

### 3.9.2 Counties

Counties across the country have national forests or grasslands within their boundaries. County governments have a special relationship with the Forest Service in that both collaborate extensively as land-use managers and maintain ongoing consultation about national forest management. Working closely with county governments helps the Forest Service engage and built trust with the public, thereby increasing community members' forest stewardship interests that lead to better land management decisions through varied and indigenous ideas, knowledge, and viewpoints.

County governments and the services they provide can be quite complex. Counties operate dozens of distinct business functions overseen by a commission, the role of which can concurrently include the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. County governments have broad



decision-making capacity, and county officials, typically called commissioners, are elected.

County officials may be the closest governmental entity for many people and are thereby in touch with those communities, making individual commissioners' relationships with local Forest Service staff and broader partnership arrangements between counties and the agency vitally important. County commissioners are also frequently members of larger groups that collaborate with the Forest Service outside formal partnership arrangements.

Note that Alaska is geographically divided into boroughs and Louisiana into parishes, not counties.

### 3.9.2.2 Partnering Goals

Counties partner with national forests and grasslands to support many important efforts, some of which are State mandated:

- Aquatic and wildlife habitat and native species restoration
- Conservation education involving both schools and the general public
- Exotic and noxious weed control
- Forest ecosystem stewardship
- Green infrastructure enhancement
- Road and trail maintenance and repair
- Stream and watershed protection through well-managed county services such as potable water and wastewater collection and treatment
- Recreational and tourism promotion

In pursuit of these goals, counties are in a unique position to take advantage of grant programs offered by the USDA. For example, the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) implements the [Emergency Forest Restoration Program](#) (EFRP), which helps the owners of non-industrial private forests restore their lands damaged by natural disasters. The local FSA County Committee plays a large role in implementing the EFRP. Another example includes USDA Rural Development, which provides [Community Facility Grants](#) for the development of essential community facilities in rural areas and towns of up to 20,000 in population. Grant funds can be used to construct, enlarge, or improve facilities for public safety and community and public services. Grants are available to counties and other public entities, such as municipalities, special-purpose districts, non-profit corporations, and tribal governments.

### 3.9.2.3 Secure Rural Schools and Self-Determination Act and Other Funding

Over 100 years ago, the Federal government began compensating counties that gave up timber land that became national forests. This revenue sharing still exists today in the form of the [Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act](#). This law provides small, rural communities with funding for road maintenance; education and local schools; and conservation efforts and county and Federal land-use projects where national forests are designated. Initially passed in 2000, the law has been reauthorized several times since.

The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act is just one example of the many ways that counties and national forests remain interdependent. National forests are integrated into rural counties on many levels, including as important economic growth and development drivers, such as through wildland fire activities, forest product manufacturing, tourism, and other activities.

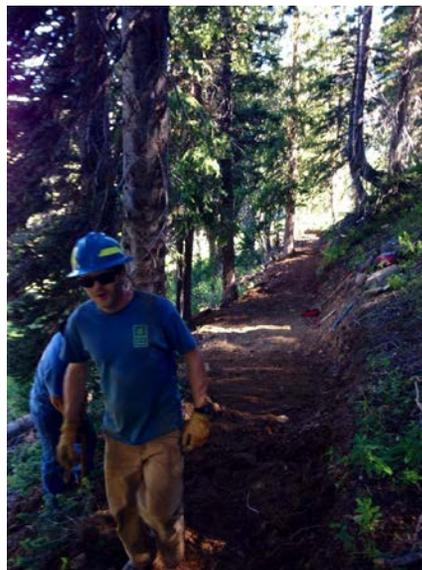
### 3.9.2.4 Affiliations

As the primary representative of county governments, the [National Association of Counties](#) partners extensively with the Forest Service and other Federal agencies by supporting local county-Federal government collaboration.

## 3.10 State Forestry Departments

State forestry departments may either be stand-alone agencies or managed through the State's department of agriculture, conservation, or natural resources. They may be referred to as departments of forestry, departments of natural resources, State forest services, or other titles, but they all generally exist for the same primary reasons: to collect and share information about State and private forest conditions; conserve forest resources; and protect forestlands. Most departments fall under the direction of a State Forester, typically an appointed position, who is charged with acting on all forestry-related matters in cooperation with other State officials and a capable staff.

In many cases State-level forestry departments not only collaborate with Federal agencies but also with other State-level agencies, specifically, fish and wildlife departments. State fish and wildlife agencies are primarily focused on conserving and managing private lands and waters and preserving fish and wildlife habitats within their borders. Focal areas for these State organizations include but are not limited to migratory birds, fish habitat, invasive species, energy development, climate change, wildlife action plans, conservation education, leadership training and international relations.



### 3.10.1 Partnering Goals

While States may face unique forest health and other land management issues that drive their sometimes distinct partnership programs, many have similar goals:

- Collectively manage millions of acres of State forestland and to support management of non-Federal rural and urban forests across America, including county, municipal, private, and Tribal land.
- Address forest health issues proactively and responsibly by supporting research and practices concerning catastrophic wildfire mitigation; climate change; forest disease, insects, and invasive plants; threatened and endangered species; and watershed health
- Conserve and protect forest lands and resources across boundaries to meet today's needs and plan for the future
- Ensure that forest landowners have the best educational, financial, and technical help available to be environmentally responsible
- Practice sustainable forestry and seek to balance ecological, economic, and social benefits

### 3.10.2 Programs

States partner extensively with the Forest Service through its State and Private Forestry branch or deputy area, particularly through three programs: Community Forest, Forest Legacy, and Forest Stewardship. Each State has coordinator(s) who lead these programs at the State level. For more information on State and Private Forestry, refer to [chapter 2](#) of this guide.

#### 3.10.2.1 Community Forest Program

The Community Forest Program, authorized by the [2008 Farm Bill \[Section 8003 of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 \(Public Law 110-234\)\]](#), is designed to encourage places that foster and support cultural and environmental education, protect habitat and water quality, offer opportunities to recreate and enjoy nature, and promote local economies through timber resources. Relying on a granting authority that enables the Forest Service to offer financial help to local and Tribal governments and qualified nonprofit entities, this program aims to establish community forests that provide accessible and sustainable community benefits. More information concerning the Community Forest Program is available on the [Forest Service State and Private Forestry Web site](#).

#### 3.10.2.2 Forest Legacy Program

Ongoing development of the Nation's forested areas poses an increasing threat to maintaining the integrity of the Nation's valuable forest lands. The Forest Legacy Program supports State efforts to protect environmentally sensitive forest lands and the benefits they provide: beautiful surroundings, aquatic and wildlife habitat, forest product availability, outdoor recreational pursuits, and soil and watershed health. Designed to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands, this entirely voluntary program maximizes the public benefits it achieves by focusing on acquiring partial interests in privately owned forest lands. The program also helps States develop and carry out their forest conservation plans by encouraging and supporting conservation easement acquisitions, legally binding agreements transferring a negotiated set of property rights from one party to

another without removing the property from private ownership. Most Forest Legacy Program conservation easements restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices, and protect other values. More information is available on the [Forest Service State and Private Forestry website](#).

### 3.10.2.3 Forest Stewardship Program

Authorized by the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978, the Forest Stewardship Program provides technical help through State forestry agency partners to non-industrial private forest owners. The program's primary focus is the development of comprehensive, multi-resource management plans that provide landowners with the information they need to manage their forests for a variety of products and services, encouraging and enabling active long-term forest management. More information is available online on the [Forest Service website](#).



### 3.10.2.4 Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003 – Insect and Disease Provision

A provision of the 2014 Farm Bill (“Agriculture Act of 2014”) modified the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003, providing the Department of Agriculture and the Forest Service an opportunity to work more closely with States to restore lands on a landscape scale. More specifically, at the request of a State, the Forest Service now has the authority to designate landscape-scale areas in national forests for targeted restoration and fuel reduction projects, those areas that are at risk or under attack from disease or insect infestation. The authority aligns with other agency efforts and provides increased flexibility, leading to more resilient landscapes and increasing the pace and scale of restoration.

As of September 2014, in response to requests from 35 States, the Chief of the Forest Service had designated approximately 45.6 million acres of NFS lands across 94 national forests for targeted, increased restoration. Although these designations were not expected to immediately result in more work being accomplished, nor were the designations a commitment by the agency to treat all 45.6 million acres, planning and implementation of projects within the designated areas was expected to expand in FY15 and beyond. The Forest Service planned to work with States, Tribes, partners, stakeholders and the public to develop and implement these landscape scale restoration projects.

### 3.10.2.5 State Forest Action Plans

Forest Action Plans collectively represent the first-ever strategic plan for the Nation's forests. The impetus for this historic effort grew out of landmark changes in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (the 2008 Farm Bill) when Congress tasked the States and Territories to assess the forests within their boundaries and develop strategies to address threats and improve forest health. The resulting Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies, or Forest Action Plans, include forest conditions and trends analysis while delineating priority forest landscape areas. They

offer practical, long-term plans for investing Federal, State, and other resources where they can be most effective in achieving National conservation goals.

State forestry agencies have a long history of working with conservation groups, Federal agencies, landowners, and industry to preserve, manage, and protect the Nation’s forests. Forest Action Plans are guiding their work throughout the States and Territories to ensure these lands are managed, conserved, and enjoyed now and into the future. More information is available on the [Forest Action Plans Web site](#).



### 3.10.3 Wildland Fire Management

Because wildland fire crosses all boundaries and jurisdictions, States are actively engaged in helping landowners and resource managers sustain forests and protect communities and the environment from catastrophic wildland fires. In addition to working closely with the Forest Service and other Federal agencies in cooperative wildland fire mitigation efforts, States also help rural and volunteer fire departments through equipment, grants, and training. Climate change, the growing wildland-urban interface, and hazardous vegetation buildup have made managing wildfire riskier and more complex.

#### 3.10.3.1 National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy

To meet the challenge, the Forest Service and its partners in Federal, State, Tribal, and local governments as well as nongovernmental partners are cooperating in a new wildland

fire management strategy involving community preparedness, ecosystem restoration, and wildfire response.

In response to the Federal Land Assistance, Management, and Enhancement (FLAME) Act of 2009, an intergovernmental committee known as the [Wildland Fire Leadership Council](#) directed development of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy. This collaborative process calls for active involvement at all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, and the public to seek national, all-lands solutions to wildland fire management issues. More information is available at two specific places ([click here for the first](#) and [click here or the second](#)) on the Forest Service website.

### 3.10.3.2 Other Wildland Fire Collaborative Management Efforts

Examples of Forest Service cooperative fire assistance and protection program collaboration through its State affiliations follow:

- [Aviation Management](#) provides aeronautical leadership and direction concerning safe and efficient use of aircraft in controlling wildland fire.
- The [Federal Excess Personal Property program](#) refers to Forest Service-owned property that is on loan to State Foresters for the purpose of wildland and rural firefighting. Most of the property originally belonged to the Department of Defense. Once acquired by the Forest Service, it is loaned to State cooperators for firefighting purposes.
- The [Planning and Prevention program](#) supports the Forest Service's efforts to reduce catastrophic wildfire risk. The Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Fire Planning and Prevention Program provides financial technical and financial help to rural communities and organizations for developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans to reduce human-caused wildfires through wildfire prevention plans and programs.
- [State Fire Assistance](#) is a Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry effort that provides financial and technical fire program assistance within the 20 northeastern States. Funds are

given directly to State forest fire protection organizations to enhance the firefighting capacity of local, rural, and State organizations through hazard mitigation and preparedness activities.

- [Volunteer Fire Assistance](#), formerly known as the Rural Community Fire Protection program, involves State forestry agency-administered 50-50 cost-sharing grants to rural community fire departments. The program's main goal is to provide Federal financial, technical, and other help in organizing, training, and equipping fire departments protecting populations of 10,000 or less.

### 3.10.4 Affiliations

States partner collectively with the Forest Service through the [National Association of State Foresters](#) as well as the following:

- [Council of Western State Foresters](#)
- [Northeastern Area Association of State Foresters](#)
- [Southern Group of State Foresters](#)
- [Western Forestry Leadership Coalition](#)

## 3.11 Public-Private Partnerships

The Forest Service is increasingly engaged in Public-Private Partnerships (P3) as a unique way to unite overlapping interests across all the organizational sectors explored in this chapter – government, business, and non-profit – in order to increase effectiveness in forest management. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that organizations within these diverse sectors can achieve a greater impact by working together through shared solutions to shared problems. This shift toward a more networked approach is occurring not just in the Forest Service but across the Federal government – according to [a recent report](#) published by the University of

Southern California, over the past several years, there have been a number of efforts to create an infrastructure to facilitate these innovative developments.

One of the ways the Forest Service has created a supportive infrastructure for P3 initiatives is its 2011 [Public-Private Partnership Strategy](#). This Strategy advocates the expansion of partnerships, strategic alliances, and collaboratives throughout the agency. It also identifies the need to ensure adequate organizational resources, budget guidance, and legal authorities necessary to achieve these new relationships.

As a result of this initiative, the agency – often in partnership with the NFF and NFWF – has been able to realize new, [exciting endeavors](#) with businesses like Coca-Cola, Vail Resorts, and Excel Energy; with non-governmental organizations including The Nature Conservancy, Coalition for the Upper South Platte, and the Cottonwood Canyons Foundation; and with other governments and Federal agencies, such as the Federal Bureau of Reclamation, the State of California, and the city of Baltimore. The Forest Service's Congressionally-chartered foundations are typically essential in the development, implementation, and expansion of these P3 relationships.



### 3.12 Resources

- [Association of Partners for Public Land](#)
- [Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative](#)
- [National Association of Conservation Districts](#)
- [National Association of Counties](#)
- [National Forest Foundation Collaboration Resources](#)
- [National Forest Foundation](#)
- [National Fish and Wildlife Foundation](#)
- [Public Lands Council](#)
- [Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-DetermiNation Act](#)
- [State Forest Action Plans](#)
- [Sustainable Forests Roundtable](#)
- [U.S. Department of the Interior Partnership](#)
- [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Wildlife Refuge System](#)
- [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Soaring to New Heights: A Guide to Creating a Sustainable Friends/Refuge Collaboration](#)
- [USDA FS Partnership Resource Center](#)
- [USDA Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations](#)
- [USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry Cooperative Programs](#)
- [Wildland Fire Leadership Council](#)