



Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners meets emergency heating needs in New Hampshire. Image courtesy of Kearsarge Neighborhood Partners.

Firewood Banks: Meeting a Critical Need for Heating in Vulnerable Communities

Heating with wood is used in homes across the United States, and it's especially important in Tribal communities. The Census Bureau estimates that more than 2.3 million households use wood as a primary heating source. In counties with a high percentage of Tribal communities, it's not unusual for one in three households to rely primarily on wood for heat.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service is partnering with the Alliance for Green Heat to provide key financial assistance to community

firewood banks through its small grants program, which helps to supply needed tools and equipment. From 2022 to 2024, grants of \$5,000 to \$15,000 were provided to 80 firewood banks in 24 States to make this work possible. This funding, \$8 million in total over 5 years, comes from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

As the price of energy continues to rise, the role of firewood banks is expected to grow. The Alliance for Green Heat says there are at least 153 firewood banks in the United States. The Alliance promotes modern wood and pellet heating systems as a low-carbon, sustainable, and affordable energy solution.

"Most of us live in urban areas so we don't realize how widespread and important firewood banks are. Support from the Forest Service is going a long way to bolstering a national network of volunteers helping people stay warm," says John Ackerly, president of the Alliance for Green Heat.



Darian Dyer, Alliance for Green Heat staff member, and Koho4Hopi firewood bank leader Matt Honanie and his daughters at a firewood bank in Second Mesa, AZ. Image courtesy of Darian Dyer.

FIREWOOD BANKS WORK LIKE FOOD BANKS

Firewood banks play an important role in meeting demand for home heating in much the same way that foodbanks meet local needs for food. Firewood banks can be run by nonprofits, churches and other religious organizations, State or local governments, or Tribes. Volunteers help split, stack, and store wood to be picked up by or delivered to those in need.

“Our main priority is providing financial and educational resources to community and Tribal firewood bank programs to support lower income individuals who are struggling to heat their homes. A second priority is to expand access to the leftover wood from forest operations, which can help reduce fuel loads and mitigate wildfire risk,” Ackerly says.

FIREWOOD BANKS MITIGATE WILDFIRE AND IMPROVE FOREST HEALTH

Firewood banks provide a use for dead and dying trees that can fuel wildfires. In many States, dead and dying trees can’t be transported from areas where invasive species, such as emerald ash borers, are present. A firewood bank can use these trees in accordance with local restrictions.

Wood offers many advantages over other heating fuels. It is inexpensive, renewable, locally sourced, safe to store (for years), and transport. Firewood is also sustainable if harvested correctly. With best management practices, forests can deliver relatively inexpensive fuel year after year.

DRY WOOD BURNS CLEANER

While firewood can have negative impact on air quality, the Alliance for Green Heat actively works on solutions—dry wood is always key.

“We encourage firewood banks to use moisture meters to ensure they are using dry, cleaner-burning wood,” Ackerly says.

More Information

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FAST FACTS

- The Alliance for Green Heat helped over 80 firewood banks serve 9,186 homes with 12,762 cords of wood
- Funding for firewood bank assistance comes from the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law
- Modern, high-quality woodstoves have significantly reduced emissions, especially when burning dry wood



Eric Axelrod, head of the Wood4Good firewood bank outside Burlington, VT. Courtesy photo by Wood4Goods. Image courtesy of Wood4Good.

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