



Forest Service Summary

The Forest Service has launched a robust, 10-year strategy to squarely address this wildfire crisis in the places where it poses the most immediate threats to communities. The strategy, called [“Confronting the Wildfire Crisis: A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America’s Forests,”](#) combines a historic investment of congressional funding with years of scientific research and planning into a national effort that will dramatically increase the scale of forest health treatments over the next decade. We are committed to working together to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from wildfires by improving forest and grassland conditions through restoration.

Acknowledgment of the Wildfire Crisis:

- The 2021 fire year was challenging on many fronts.
- Through the challenges and opportunities, we persevered because of the tireless efforts of thousands of wildland firefighters from across the nation, along with your leadership and support.
- In 2021, 1,017 wildfires consumed 48,195 acres across Colorado, impacting multiple communities.
- Over the years, we have witnessed how our overgrown forests, a warming climate, and a growing number of homes in the wildland-urban interface following more than a century of rigorous fire suppression have all contributed to what is now a full-blown wildfire crisis.

Our Collective Response:

- To tackle the wildfire crisis, we are using every tool and authority to improve the health of America’s forests by increasing hazardous fuels reduction work by up to four times the current levels across larger landscapes.
- An important tool we use to reduce wildfire risk includes using fire in the right place, at the right time, and for the right reasons.
- To be clear, we do not have a “let it burn” policy. The Forest Service’s policy is that every fire receives a strategic, risk-based response, commensurate with the threats and opportunities, and uses the full spectrum of management actions, that consider fire and fuel conditions, weather, values at risk, and resources available and that is in alignment with the applicable Land and Resource Management Plan.
- Line officers approve decisions on strategies and Incident Commanders implement those through tactics in line with the conditions they are dealing with on each incident.

- We know the dynamic wildland fire environment requires the use of multiple suppression strategies on any incident; however, this year we will more clearly articulate how and when we specifically use fire for resource benefit.
- During National and/or Regional Preparedness Levels 4 and 5, when difficult trade-off decisions must be made in how to deploy scarce resources most effectively, Regional Forester approval will be required to use this fire management strategy.
- Our focus and priority are to utilize the significantly increased funds we received from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), along with our regular appropriations to reduce the risk of wildland fire, restore ecosystems, and invest in natural resources related infrastructure.
- To carry out this important work, the Forest Service has established a Wildfire Risk Reduction Infrastructure Team (WRRIT) and they have developed a 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
- The 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy calls for the Forest Service to treat up to an additional 20 million acres of national forests and grasslands and support the treatment of up to an additional 30 million acres of other Tribal, federal, state, private, and family lands.
- In Colorado, we have done the prework to set ourselves up for success. With four Good Neighbor Agreements in place, as well as the 2019 Shared Stewardship Agreement, we have established the framework for us to accomplish mutual goals and respond to the ecological, natural resource, and recreational challenges we all face.
- Last week we announced the initial investment of \$18.1 million to treat 10,000 acres in Fiscal Year 2022. The project areas are located on Arapaho, Roosevelt, Pike and San Isabel National Forests.
- This funding also provides for building our workforce to accomplish this work, including hiring 400 permanent non-fire positions in Colorado, along with national efforts underway such as creating a new occupational series for wildland firefighters and increasing the base salary of Federal wildland firefighters.

Preparedness:

- Based on the fire potential outlook, we are anticipating another active fire year.
- In preparation, we are working with the Wildfire Risk Management Science Team at the Rocky Mountain Research Station to pre-plan for fire using a risk management approach, which helps us develop landscape-scale wildfire response options before fires start.
- In preparation of an active fire year, pre-season engagement planning is underway. Together as partner agencies, we are leveraging the best science available, including the Potential Operational Delineation (PODS) program led by USDA Forest Service's Research and Development branch. PODs are spatial units or containers defined by potential control features, such as roads and ridge tops, within which relevant information on forest conditions, ecology, and fire potential can be summarized.
- The Rocky Mountain Region hosts over 525 firefighters, 56 engines, 5 Interagency Hotshot Crews, 3 Interagency Incident Management Teams and is part of the robust Forest Service fire organization comprising 10,000 firefighters, 44 Air Tankers and 200 helicopters and additional Incident Management Teams as needed.

- In Colorado alone, there are 225 firefighters tied to initial response. There are 27 engines, 7 10-person modules, and 3 Type 3 helicopters with modules.
- National shared resources in Colorado include 89 firefighters tied to 3 Interagency Hotshot Crews (IHCs), 1 Type 2 helicopter with module, 2 Type 1 helicopters, and 2 airtanker bases.
- The Forest Service and Department of the Interior are increasing their capacity from 2021 levels to 16,700 Federal firefighters (11,300 Forest Service, 5,400 DOI) to better respond to wildfires across the nation.
- We can also activate up to 13,000 additional employees throughout our departments to support wildfire response.
- These surge employees provide additional capacity to wildfire response, ranging from firefighting capabilities to critical response support through incident management, acquisition and human resources.
- The Forest Service and Department of the Interior also have additional capacity to call 11,000 administratively determined personnel from outside their departments to support the response. These employees are generally retired agency personnel who can be dispatched to support incident management teams and other firefighting functions.
- These additional resources will increase our capacity to engage potentially large wildfires as they are emerging.
- In addition to aviation, other resources will be pre-positioned around the Region as wildfire activity evolves. These resources will include personnel, equipment, and aviation assets.
- All of this will be done following our COVID-19 mitigation procedures to ensure that responders remain healthy and ready to serve.

Recovery:

- USDA Forest Service Rocky Mountain Region will receive approximately \$85 million to recover and restore national forests, watersheds, and communities impacted by 2020 and 2021 wildfires, with nearly \$75M of those funds coming to Colorado.
- The disaster funds will be used to repair infrastructure and natural resources damaged by the 2020 and 2021 Grizzly Creek, Sylvan, Cameron Peak, East Troublesome, Calwood, Williams Fork, and Middle Fork wildfires on the Arapaho, Roosevelt, Routt, and White River National Forests in Colorado.
- The funding is a share of the \$1.36 billion of supplemental appropriations provided to the Forest Service through the Extending Government Funding and Delivering Emergency Assistance Act of 2021.
- We are committed to continuing the post-wildfire recovery and restoration work that has been ongoing since even before the wildfires were suppressed. Our disaster recovery and restoration work connect to the agency's 10-year wildfire crisis strategy and other efforts to build on existing relationships and create new partnerships to place fuels and forest health treatments in the right places and at the right pace and scale.

