



Bringing Idaho's forestlands back to health

Idaho's forestlands total over 21 million acres, an area the size of Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island combined. They are the headwaters for our great rivers and home to Idaho's iconic native fish and wildlife. They are also places where we work and play, sustaining Idaho's recreation and timber economies and providing lifeblood for nearby towns. But the health of these forests is rapidly declining. Without broad-scale restoration, the future of our forests, and the wildlife and communities that depend on them, will be at risk.

Why use prescribed fire to restore forests?

Fire has been essential to the health of forest ecosystems for millennia. But for the last century, the suppression of fire in places that evolved with fire has created hazardous and unhealthy conditions. This is made worse by increasingly warm and dry conditions caused by climate change. In the absence of low-intensity and frequent burns, forests are overcrowded and more prone to insect and disease outbreaks, and communities are threatened by the increased risk of megafires.

Science shows that restoration employing a combination of thinning—removing smaller trees and overgrowth to allow healthier spacing—and prescribed fire—lighting small fires under safe, controlled conditions—can make our forests and nearby communities more resilient. These practices can reduce wildfire risk, enhance wildlife habitat, protect old growth and diverse ecosystems, and prepare forests for a changing climate.



Our goals

By 2025, we'll help double the current scale of forest restoration in Idaho. We will also support the Forest Service in doubling the number of acres restored in Idaho using a variety of forest management practices, including prescribed fire, thinning and more.

How we'll get there

- Ensure sound science shapes implementation of the Shared Stewardship Agreement in Idaho.
- Establish and staff the Idaho Prescribed Fire Council to build public support for the use of prescribed fire and managed wildfire to make forests and nearby communities more resilient.
- Expand partnerships directly with the Forest Service to help increase funding, training and capacity to broaden the use of prescribed fire.

How we are making a difference

As part of our Land and Water Conservation initiative, we're working to restore forests through collaborative projects that make a direct impact on the ground and by advocating for policies to bring science-based solutions to scale.

A core focus of our forest program is aimed at expanding the Forest Service's ability to use prescribed fire in high-priority areas. TNC has recently established partnerships with the Caribou-Targhee National Forest in Eastern Idaho and Panhandle National Forest in North Idaho to deploy short-term crews of trained fire professionals dedicated to reducing a backlog of restoration projects. Because these crews are hired by TNC, they are able to focus on proactive forest treatments without getting pulled away to wildfire suppression efforts. This type of partnership model will enable TNC to expand much-needed solutions to Idaho forests across the state.

Why this moment?

Megafires threaten both our forests and communities. The failing health of Idaho's forestlands demands urgent action. Science shows that forest restoration practices bring forests back to health. Now, TNC is working to put these practices on the ground, through direct partnerships and policy advocacy, on a scale that matches the problem. We need to work together today to advocate for careful use of prescribed fire to prevent the next megafire.