

**U.S. Natural Climate Solutions Accelerator Finalist: Central Cascades Forest Products: Catalyzing a Landscape-Scale Climate Solution for the U.S. Interior West.**  
The Nature Conservancy, Washington State Chapter.

**The Central Cascades Forest Products** project aims to: 1) negotiate forest stewardship contracts to help accelerate forest management practices that reduce wildfire risk; and 2) support forest products businesses that will utilize small diameter trees as a by-product of forest thinning to remove potentially hazardous sources of fire fuel. Benefits include supporting forests' capacity to continue providing critical ecosystem services—such as fish and wildlife habitat, water provisioning, wood products and recreational opportunities—while sequestering carbon and creating economic opportunities.

- **How it works:** By entering into large-scale stewardship contracts with public landowners, the initiative aims to help address the 1.2-million-acre restoration need in the Central Cascades. The stewardship contract outsources the following to third parties: the environmental analysis necessary for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance; forest thinning; prescribed fire; and aquatic improvements. The contract structure provides additional capacity to public landowners, and allows the profits generated from thinning activities to be reinvested in other restoration treatments and future planning. Forest thinning results in reduction in fire severity, and thereby helps to avoid carbon emissions from wildfire. The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is to be the pilot landscape for this strategy.
- **Forest Products Business Model:** Restoration harvests through thinning can be utilized by new or revamped infrastructure to accommodate and profitably process small diameter trees. The small diameter trees from restoration harvests represent a multibillion-dollar revenue opportunity, which is currently untapped due to a lack of nearby sawmills and other infrastructure to process these trees into a valuable product. Reducing the haul distance to mill infrastructure and/or improving processing efficiency is estimated to increase landowner profits from restoration harvest by as much as 75 percent. New or expanded forest products businesses can render previously uneconomic restoration harvest viable.
- **Scaling up:** The forest health and management challenges that this project proposes to address within the Central Cascades affect more than 150 million acres of forestland in the U.S. Interior West. The model of using stewardship contracts and forest products infrastructure to accelerate forest restoration has the potential for expansion across this landscape and other dry forest ecosystems. With these changes to the underlying economic conditions, land managers—who over the last 100 years have been practicing suppression of low-intensity burns—can instead utilize the profits from restoration harvests to restore ecosystem function in dry forests.

Project success aims to result in climate change mitigation and deliver meaningful economic benefits to local communities by providing long-term jobs and making restoration activities economically viable.