



United States
Department of
Agriculture

<http://www.usda.gov>

FACT SHEET

United States
Department of
the Interior



<http://www.doi.gov>

Progress Reported on Implementing President Bush's Healthy Forests Initiative

Background: The Worst Fire Seasons in 50 Years

- An estimated 190 million acres of public lands are at elevated risk of severe wildfires. In 2000 and 2002, the United States suffered two of our worst wildland fire seasons in 50 years.
- The 2002 fire season saw 88,458 fires burn roughly 7 million acres, destroy more than 800 structures, and take the lives of 23 firefighters. New Mexico, Oregon, Colorado, and Arizona registered their worst fires in modern history.
- In 2003, Southern California suffered its worst wildland fire season in modern history as wildfires burned over 739,000 acres destroying 3,600 homes claiming 22 civilian lives and costing \$250 million to contain.

The Healthy Forests Initiative

The President introduced his Healthy Forests Initiative (HFI) in August 2002 at the height of one of the worst fire seasons the Nation has ever experienced. Tragically, the dangers and losses associated with catastrophic fire continued in 2003. With assistance from Congress and through administrative actions, work is proceeding on high priority thinning and restoration projects. In passing the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA), Congress has provided the Administration additional tools needed to fully implement the President's Healthy Forests Initiative.

Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003

On December 3, 2003, President Bush signed the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Act into law. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior have responded swiftly and aggressively to implement this major piece of legislation. The Forest Service has already developed and issued an interim final rule for a special administrative review process for hazardous fuels reduction projects in national forests. The Forest Service and Department of the Interior agencies have also established an interagency implementation team that will produce an HFRA implementation guide by early March.

Funding the Healthy Forests Initiative

The Departments have developed an integrated interagency approach to fund activities, which advance the goals of the Healthy Forests Initiative, including those activities under the HFRA. In the FY 2005 proposed budget, a total of \$760 million is targeted for work to reduce hazardous fuels and restore forest and rangeland health. (See the funding table below.)

This budget supports the purposes of the Healthy Forests Initiative and Title 1 in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, focusing on forest and rangeland health restoration to achieve more comprehensive and effective results on the ground.

Healthy Forests Initiative Administrative Improvements At Work

Under President Bush's leadership, the federal land management agencies have implemented several administrative initiatives to help expedite projects aimed to restore forest and rangeland health, as called for under the HFI, including:

- New procedures, provided under the National Environmental Policy Act, to allow priority fuels reduction and forest restoration projects identified through collaboration with state, local and tribal governments and interested parties to move forward more quickly. The Forest Service has implemented at least 46 high priority projects using the new procedures, and the Bureau of Land Management is currently implementing more than 20 projects.
- Improvement of Forest Service's administrative review process to encourage early and more meaningful public participation to project planning and implementation of forest health projects.
- Guidance to Federal agencies to make consultations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) more timely and better account for long-term benefits to threatened and endangered species.
- Guidance from the Council on Environmental Quality to improve environmental assessments (EAs) for priority forest health projects. The Departments of Agriculture and the Interior have implemented this guidance by preparing EAs for 15 pilot fuels treatment projects. Thus far, the agencies have completed EAs using the enhanced process on 13 of the 15 pilot projects.
- New regulations under ESA are expected to significantly accelerate the planning, review and implementation of fuels reduction and forest health activities.

Stewardship Contracting Legislation

- In December 2002, Congress enacted legislation expanding stewardship contracting authority, a key component of the HFI. The legislation allows Federal agencies to enter into long-term (up to 10 years) contracts with small businesses, communities and nonprofit organizations to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health.
- The new authority allows contractors, community groups, and others to keep the wood material as partial payment for their service, while improving environmental conditions and adhering to applicable environmental regulations.
- Long-term contracts foster a public/private partnership to restore forest and rangeland health by giving contractors the incentive to invest in equipment and facilities needed to productively use material from forest thinning to make useful wood products or to produce biomass energy, all at a savings to taxpayers.
- The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management have approved stewardship contracts using the new authority requested by the President and provided by Congress. In 2003, the Forest Service awarded more than 30 stewardship contracts and expects to award an additional 60 in 2004. BLM expects to carry out 39 stewardship contracts in 2004.
- On January 9, 2004, the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior announced guidelines to develop and implement stewardship contracts and agreements so that there is consistency in contracting services across agencies.

Improved Coordination

In 2003, USDA and DOI formed the Interagency Wildland Fire Leadership Council to further implement the National Fire Plan and to combat wildland fires more effectively. The council provides a coordinated, seamless management structure to all aspects of wildland fire policy under the Healthy Forests Initiative and integrates federal fire activities with those of states, tribes and local governments, including land restoration and rehabilitation.

Record Amounts of Hazardous Fuels Restoration Work Accomplished (All acres treated under the National Fire Plan unless otherwise noted.)

- In 2002, Federal land management agencies restored a record 2.25 million acres, an increase of a million acres over FY 2000 levels.
- In 2003, the agencies exceeded that level, restoring 2.6 million acres, including 1.6 million acres in the wildland urban interface.
- From 2001-2003, agencies treated a total of 7 million acres. In FY 2004, the agencies plan to treat an additional 3.7 million acres (2.6 million under the National Fire Plan and 1.1 from other related activities), bringing the combined total since 2001 to nearly 11 million acres.

For more information on the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 and the Healthy Forests Initiative, please visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/projects/hfi/> or <http://www.doi.gov/hfi/newhfi/>.

		FY 2005
Department of the Interior		
Hazardous Fuels		\$ 209,282
Joint Fire Science		\$ 4,000
Forest Management		\$ 44,000
Vegetation & Watershed		\$ 25,700
Wildlife & Fish		\$ 7,500
Rangeland Management		\$ 17,000
Stewardship Contracting		\$ 3,500
DOI TOTAL		\$ 310,982
Forest Service		
<i>Research</i>		\$ 19,000
<i>State & Private Forestry</i>		
Forest Health Management		\$ 3,897
State Fire Assistance		\$ 11,000
State Fire Assistance - Emergency Supplemental for Southern California		\$ -
Economic Action Programs		\$ -
<i>National Forest System</i>		
Timber		\$ 54,859
Vegetation & Watershed		\$ 58,301
Wildlife & Fish		\$ 17,143
Stewardship Contracting		\$ 2,000
<i>Wildland Fire Management</i>		
Hazardous Fuels		\$ 266,238
National Fire Plan R&D		\$ 13,000
Hazardous Fuels - Emergency Supplemental for Southern California		\$ -
Joint Fire Sciences		\$ 4,000
FS TOTAL		\$ 449,438
Grand TOTAL		\$ 760,420

#

January 2004