

Healthy Forests Initiative

In Harmony With Nature



“What would human life be without forests, those natural cities?” —Henry David Thoreau, 1843



A love of nature has no age limit.

Background

Americans have a long history of caring for the land. We established Yellowstone National Park 130 years ago, and our National Forest System will be a century old in 2005—a sign of awareness of the importance of sustaining the health of our forests and rangelands. Today, the Federal Government manages about one-third of the Nation’s lands and the health of our natural resources is still a concern and will likely remain so for future generations of Americans.

Acutely aware of the need to actively manage our natural resources for the future, President George W. Bush introduced the Healthy Forests Initiative as one measure to restore forest and rangeland health and protect communities from catastrophic wildland fires.



President George W. Bush sees first-hand the effects of wildland fire.

Healthy Forests Initiative

The impetus for the Healthy Forests Initiative came from the severe wildland fires of 2000 and 2002, when 8.4 million and 6.9 million acres burned, respectively. These catastrophic fires have compromised the health of our Nation's natural resources and the stability of many communities. But addressing the wildland fire threat in and around communities isn't enough—we must also be a good neighbor and focus on the health of our public lands. Wildland fires will continue to pose a threat until active land management is employed more frequently and on a scale never before seen.



Public land agencies work with communities at risk from wildland fires. But, we also need to focus on public lands adjacent to these communities.

These severe wildland fires also emphasized the need to accelerate completion of the National Fire Plan, a joint U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of the Interior (USDI) program that lessens the damage caused by catastrophic and costly fires by restoring the land to a healthier state.



Healthy forests and grasslands can lessen the threat of catastrophic wildland fires.

What's Different?

The Healthy Forests Initiative and other USDA/USDI programs have already made a difference. Federal land management agencies are protecting forests, rangelands, watersheds, critical wildlife habitat, and communities from catastrophic wildfires and insects.

Despite the tremendous progress, an increase in active land management is needed so that forests and rangelands are healthier and better able to ward off devastating fires, insects, and diseases.

We're Not Through Yet!

Currently 400 million acres across all ownerships are at risk from catastrophic fire. And another 70 million acres are at serious risk from 26 different insects and diseases. Multiple years of drought increase the risk of severe wildland fires, threatening to compromise the health of our natural resources, community values, and people's livelihoods.



Both of these areas burned.

This one had been thinned.

This one had not been thinned.



Active land management can help the land prosper.



The southern pine beetle, which causes damage such as this, is just 1 of 26 different insects and diseases threatening our lands.

Public land management agencies are working to modernize rules, processes, and regulations. The Government role is important and will continue. However, the involvement of others—such as communities, Indian tribes, the private sector, and other groups—in our efforts to reduce hazardous fuels (flammable forest materials) is important. Active land management on Federal, State, and private lands is needed to restore forests, rangelands, watersheds, wildlife habitat, and communities to a healthier state.

Our Challenge

The challenge currently facing Federal and State land management agencies and private landowners is to change the condition of the land to achieve healthy forests and grasslands. The Healthy Forests Initiative is putting common sense back into the management of our Nation's public lands. The goal of this work will be to restore biologic, social, and economic harmony to America's greatest natural resource, our forests and rangelands.

It has taken decades for our forests and grasslands to reach their current conditions. With active land management, we can restore and maintain forest health. It will take time to see the land conditions change, but the land will prosper.

More Information

For more information on the Healthy Forests Initiative and the National Fire Plan, see

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/healthyforests/toc.html>

or contact your local State or Federal land management agency.



Restoring the health of America's forests and grasslands will benefit us all.

FS-762
August 2003



Prepared by the
USDA Forest Service Office of Communication