



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Washington Office | July 2022

Forest Service Equity Action Plan

Mission Area: Natural Resources and Environment

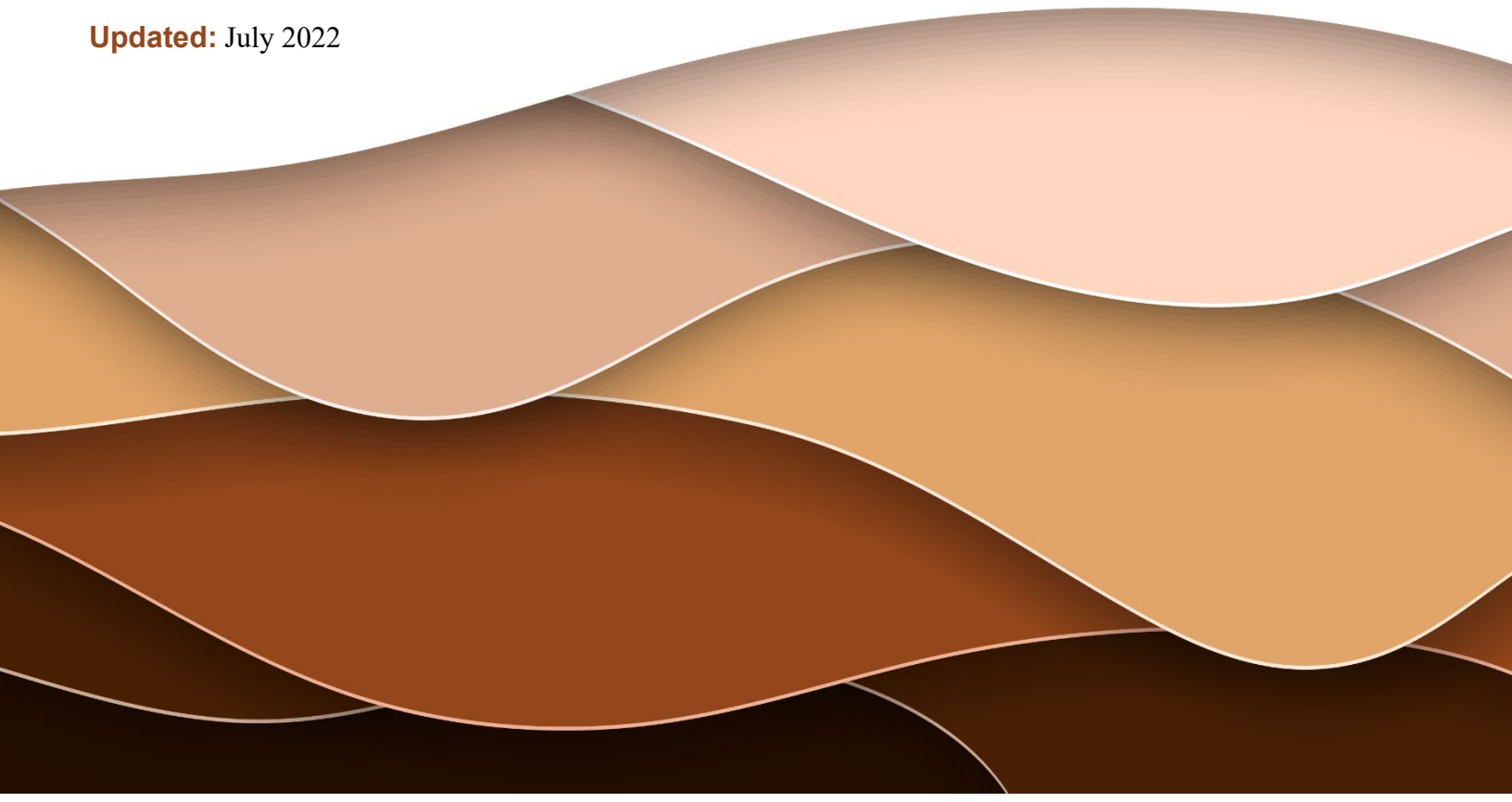
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Submitted: February 10, 2022

Updated: July 2022



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Executive Summary

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), Forest Service Equity Action Plan (hereinafter referred to as “Forest Service Equity Action Plan”) represents a broad set of high-leverage actions with potential for creating high impact and enduring systemic change that benefit employees, Tribes, partners, and the public. Delivering the Forest Service’s mission in a purposefully equitable manner requires changing traditional perspectives, processes, actions, and performance measures to ensure the full suite of benefits, outcomes, and opportunities to participate are made available to all, especially in rural and urban places that have been marginalized or overlooked.

Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government, requires the head of each agency to prepare a plan for addressing any barriers to full and equal participation in programs, services, procurement, contracting, and other funding opportunities. In this plan, the Forest Service commits to assessing barriers and identifying equity outcomes for underserved communities by focusing on the following 10 actions: increasing Tribal trust responsibilities and participation in Forest Service activities that honor Tribal rights and interests; increasing Tribal and stakeholder engagement and relationship building and equity-centered communications; achieving a representative and inclusive workforce; embedding equity in employee onboarding processes; providing economic opportunities through contracting and procurement; providing economic opportunities through grants and agreements; reducing wildfire risk to Tribes and underserved communities; expanding cooperative and state forestry assistance programs to underserved communities; expanding urban forestry benefits to underserved communities; and increasing access to recreation and outdoor experiences for underserved communities.

Information management, data needs assessment, performance management, monitoring, and mapping actions are also in development, along with action items for institutionalizing internal learning opportunities. The Forest Service performs some of its best work with and through others. The foundation for the agency’s success depends on having a high-performing, representative, and service-focused workforce. The agency’s success in equitable mission delivery depends on employees who mirror the people they serve, build community, and share stewardship with all citizens.

Forest Service Equity Actions

Community Service to All

1. **Position Agency and Tribes for Success by Expanding Tribal Costewardship**—Engage Tribes and line officers, identify barriers and opportunities, and conduct other activities focused on achieving success in a learning environment, with an initial focus on costewardship and Forest Service Tribal authorities such as the Tribal Forest Protection Act and others.
2. **Enhance Engagement and Partnerships with Tribes and Underserved Communities through Culturally Relevant Strategies**—Center the voices, diverse needs, and unique perspectives of Tribes and underserved community stakeholders and create shared leadership in achieving enduring change for equitable mission delivery.
3. **Achieve a Representative, Inclusive, and Thriving Forest Service Workforce**—Integrate and prioritize hiring authorities under the Resource Assistant, Job Corps, Public Land Corps, and Tribal Youth Conservation Programs, which will significantly increase successful placements of underrepresented employees to meet near- and long-term hiring needs.
4. **Institutionalize the Onboarding Experience for New Employees**—Implement an onboarding program that celebrates diversity, meets inclusion objectives for a growing workforce and the changing work environment, and orients new employees to Forest Service values around equitable mission delivery and Tribal trust responsibilities.

Economic Prosperity

5. **Increase Equity in Opportunities for Small and Disadvantaged Businesses**—Initiate a pilot program to provide further support to small and disadvantaged businesses by increasing capacity in procurement zones, building deeper relationships with Tribes and local small and disadvantaged businesses, and demonstrating a strong commitment to recurring national and local outreach event efforts.
6. **Increase Equity in Agreements**—Expand the pool of partners to include more Tribes and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) organizations; develop new outreach strategies; launch a working group to address issues that affect implementation and obstacles to establishing partnerships; promote Tribal relations and reduce barriers to Tribal participation; and establish an access storefront to reduce barriers to access by DEIA organizations.

Health and Resiliency

7. **Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribal, Underserved, and Socially Vulnerable Communities**—Address impacts to Tribal, underserved, and socially vulnerable communities in relative proximity to National Forest System lands by integrating data, information, and maps into planning and decision-making processes and tools. This action will ensure demographic variables are understood, considered, and addressed during tradeoff analysis and decision-making. Integrate processes into the Wildfire Crisis Strategy effort to reduce the severity and frequency of wildland fires; protect lives,

homes, and communities; achieve equity outcomes; and improve the health and resilience of our Nation's forests.

8. **Expand Cooperative Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities**—Use the Landscape Scale Restoration Program to integrate equity into proposal evaluation and guidance for competitive processes by prioritizing discretionary points for underserved communities and enhancing outreach to newly eligible Tribal and other applicants to attract proposals from rural communities.
9. **Expand Urban Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities**—Issue requests for proposals while highlighting equity considerations; develop explicit criteria for requests for proposals and evaluation guidance to prioritize underserved communities; enhance outreach to prospective applicants to attract proposals from Tribes and high-need urban communities; and work toward funding 40 percent of projects in underserved communities and with Tribes.
10. **Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Communities of Color and Socially Vulnerable Populations**—Promote research to understand who visitors are; how they recreate; who is not visiting; barriers to accessing recreation opportunities; economic, community, and personal benefits of recreation opportunities; and preferences regarding and satisfaction with recreation opportunities. Develop research-based strategies to increase visitation by communities of color. Promote use of the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience Act in support of Tribal culture and tourism enterprise.

Advancing Employee Experience and Work Environment Accomplishments

The Forest Service has been leading transformational efforts for several years to develop a values-based, purpose-driven, and relationship-focused culture. One visible example of this commitment is the Work Environment and Performance Office (WEPO), established in 2018 and cemented as a permanent part of the agency by the Secretary of Agriculture in December 2020. WEPO shares leadership with Civil Rights, Business Operations, and other agency functions to catalyze changes that improve workplace equity and foster a trusting, inclusive, and safe work environment that empowers employees to contribute to the agency's mission while realizing their potential and holding themselves and others accountable.

The Forest Service Equity Action Plan builds on early investments and successes, such as the Forest Service's anti-harassment program that reduced sexual assault/sexual harassment reports by 43 percent, decreased equal employment opportunity (EEO) harassment reports by 56 percent, and cut other harassment/bullying reports by 44 percent over a 3-year period (fiscal years [FY] 2018–20). Additionally, in FY 2021, the Forest Service's senior executive service performance standards included outreach to and hiring of a diverse, representative, inclusive, and equitable workforce. This work required expanded use of direct hire authority and diversity, equity, and inclusion student programs to build a workforce that looks like America. The Forest Service hosted a five-part, Chief-sponsored inclusivity learning series attended by over 15,000

employees during FY 2021. The agency also hosted its foundational Forest Service values dialogues through the “This Is Who We Are” national employee engagement sessions attended by over 15,000 employees over the past year.

Work environment and safety were added as critical elements to FY 2020 employee performance plans. These performance elements focus on the agency’s commitments to treat everyone with respect, empower and protect one another, invest in relationships, model integrity, and learn from mistakes. Supervisor standards include a requirement to address and correct misconduct promptly and appropriately, and supervisor training and new hire onboarding improvements resulted in increased engagement. FY 2020 scores increased by 9 percent for employee satisfaction in working for the Forest Service, as compared to the FY 2019 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey. A satisfied workforce translates to improved and equitable service to the public.

The Forest Service has formally extended the definition of employee safety to include physical, social, and psychological elements and has taken concrete actions to provide tools, services, and support through its behavioral health and employee well-being program. Given the agency’s concerns around wildland firefighters and increased mental health challenges in that community, along with the impacts of the ongoing global pandemic on all agency employees, the Forest Service is delivering better support to employees and providing tools to intervene during a mental health crisis. In 2021, the agency held monthly suicide prevention webinars reaching over 900 employees, in which clinicians provided an overview of how to recognize warning signs and how to intervene and get people help. Customized suicide prevention and response resource materials for local use were distributed. The behavioral health and employee well-being branch also printed and distributed 19,050 crisis intervention pocket cards designed to provide practical tips to help employees intervene in moments of crisis, including suicide ideation. In FY 2021 the Forest Service completed an overhaul of the agency’s employee assistance program (EAP) to provide extensive, high-quality services that focus on every aspect of mental and physical well-being and quality of life for agency employees. The Forest Service entered into an agency-wide contract to ensure consistency and efficiency and also increased services, including crisis intervention, life coaching, health coaching, and mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR). The new vendor offers 24/7 counseling via telephone, chat, and video and a website and app for easy access to tools and resources. Clinicians will answer all calls to the EAP, and clinicians with experience supporting first responders, including firefighter and law enforcement personnel, will be available.

Beyond this internally facing focus, the Forest Service took immediate actions to support Executive orders (EOs) on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA), including a commitment to improve services to all Americans by maximizing small business participation agency-wide and executing 100 percent small business set-asides for Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) contracts, focusing on small disadvantaged, 8(a), women-owned, veteran-owned, service-disabled, and certified historically underutilized businesses.

Transitioning to a Strategic Equity and Environmental Justice Roadmap

This Forest Service Equity Action Plan is the first step in a long-term journey towards integrating equity in Forest Service mission delivery. The Forest Service recognizes that all proposed equity actions are linked conceptually and/or operationally to current agency and administration priorities such as, but not limited to: the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act; the “Confronting the Wildfire Crisis” implementation strategy; the American Rescue Plan Act; the “America the Beautiful” initiative; the Great American Outdoors Act, the “Justice40 Initiative;” the Climate Conservation Corps; the “Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility” strategy; and the “Climate Adaptation Plan.”

In the coming months, the Forest Service is committed to integrating equity within and across these efforts to ensure a cohesive and consistent approach to achieving equity outcomes throughout the agency. Developing a strategic equity roadmap that builds and expands on this Forest Service Equity Action Plan will be critical in connecting the dots for all employees by showing how everyday actions fit within the Forest Service’s equitable vision for the future. The following section captures the Forest Service’s first effort to track overarching focus areas across the whole Forest Service Equity Action Plan. These topics will be integrated into the implementation of each action and will be expanded upon in upcoming roadmap development efforts.

Tribal Relationships Focus

Prior to implementation, equity actions will be assessed for Tribal consultation requirements. Additionally, actions recommending new research projects will engage with Tribes in development of research design and outcomes. All policies (new and existing) resulting from this Forest Service Equity Action Plan will be assessed for alignment with the [Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#), the [Joint Secretarial Order 3403 on Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters](#), and the Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) action plan. The Forest Service OTR action plan is under development and will be included as an appendix to the Forest Service Equity Action Plan, when available. In response to USDA feedback for more information on the specific Tribal outcomes from each equity action, the updated plan now features a “Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan” section under each action.

When OTR developed their action plan, outputs and outcomes were introduced to improve performance and increase accountability and responsiveness to Tribes, the agency, and Congress in support of our trust responsibility as a Federal agency. Several of those outcomes may be applicable to other equity actions and be modified to achieve other goals for the delivery of Forest Service programs and services, a diverse workforce, and the public that we serve. Captured in appendix A of this equity action plan is a list of sample measures that serve as a launching point for creating measurable outcomes for each equity action. As we move forward to implement these equity actions and develop the agency-wide strategic equity roadmap, we will

take steps to build accountability and fully articulate desired outcomes. All metrics related to monitoring Tribal outcomes should be coordinated with OTR.

Limited English Proficiency Focus

Among the inquiries from USDA on the November 2021 submission of this plan was a request to integrate limited English proficiency (LEP) awareness throughout the plan. This request presents a timely opportunity for the Forest Service to demonstrate our intention and ability to integrate accessibility generally—and LEP specifically—into our Forest Service Equity Action Plan. The Forest Service is well positioned in terms of contract capacity, existing partnerships, corporate knowledge, and policy and procedures to reduce or eliminate LEP as a barrier to access across the entire spectrum of programming delivered to the public. The Forest Service approach to institutionalizing LEP within the organization begins with understanding the historic context of our outreach and engagement practices. This historic context resulted in our current situation; that is, dialogue with a limited segment of the public.

One immediate barrier to inclusion of LEP audiences is that translation and interpretation services are either not readily available or they are not understood to be a free service. Conducting outreach in agency-identified target languages will ensure these audiences are made aware of the availability of translation or interpretation at no cost. Critical to effective LEP outreach is fostering meaningful relationships with these communities. By establishing strategic partnerships with DEIA organizations, the Forest Service can work together with Tribes and new partners to learn how we can best serve their communities.

In recognition of the critical nature relationship building plays in reducing language barriers to access, LEP best practices and guidance have been embedded into action 2, enhancing community engagement, and the related equity-centered communications strategy. This action will set a standard for equitable engagement and accessible outreach across all other actions. In this way, action 2 will establish a standard for equitable engagement and accessibility for LEP audiences that is globally applicable. Specific attention will be paid to inclusion of LEP best practices in following actions, which all involve program outreach and interfacing with the public as a component for achieving equity outcomes:

- Action 5: Increase Equity in Opportunities for Small and Disadvantaged Businesses
- Action 6: Increase Equity and Access in the Grants and Agreements Program
- Action 7: Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribes, Underserved and Socially Vulnerable Communities
- Action 8: Expand Cooperative Forestry Benefits to Underserved and Socially Disadvantaged Communities
- Action 9: Expand Urban Forestry Benefits to Underserved and Socially Disadvantaged Communities
- Action 10: Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Communities of Color and Socially Vulnerable Populations

Building on the maturity model approach to Forest Service equity work, the next opportunity to demonstrate the agency's commitment to accessibility, both for LEP audiences and across all

protected bases, resides in moving this conversation beyond the boundaries of the Civil Rights Office or an equity action plan team. The Forest Service will convene robust programmatic conversations around accessibility to translated materials with staff areas that engage with the diverse communities and organizations.

Gender Equity and Equality Focus

In March 2021, the Biden-Harris administration published the [Executive Order on Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council](#) and in October 2021, shared the [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#), which includes an emphasis for alignment with Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support to Underserved Communities. A USDA working group established to inform the “National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality” identified initial goals that lift up gender equality and equity, and/or can have a strong emphasis on gender equity based on the 10 priorities in the National Strategy. The Forest Service is expected to contribute to two goals: (1) Supporting Women in Agriculture, and (2) Forestry and Supporting the Safety of Women in Agriculture and Forestry.

Substantial collaboration has already occurred between Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management, Research and Development, and Workforce Environment and Performance Office that aligns with this request, such as regional and national “Women in Fire” leadership programs, trainings, and peer support groups. An example of such training is the Women in Fire Training Exchange, a cooperative agreement and collaborative effort between The Nature Conservancy, Forest Service, and agencies of the U.S. Department of the Interior. The exchange provides a 2-week prescribed fire training event that empowers women and supports female leadership development and relationship building in addition to experience in prescribed fire practices.

The Forest Service is also highlighting innovative communication opportunities to support the safety of women, as exemplified by the Innovation and Organizational Learning staff collaboration with [Anchor Point Film](#), which addresses reports of assault in the wildland fire community. The staff hosted a prerelease screening of the film and a panel discussion with the director and main characters of the film for up to 200 employees. The Forest Service purchased the educational rights to the film for all Forest Service employees and is developing a moderator’s guide to attach and use during 2022.

Finally, recent analysis from WEPO’s policy, analysis, and accountability branch highlighted opportunities for Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management to pilot novel approaches to the prevention of, and response to, sexual harassment in the work environment. A “Deep Dive Team” was established and used a series of focus groups to identify and vet potential initiatives to (1) initiate dialogue, (2) build capacity to generate relevant tools to support ongoing dialogue, and (3) provide avenues for continuous feedback to support an iterative and adaptive ongoing response. The WEPO, Innovation and Organizational Learning, and Washington Office Fire and Aviation Management staff have begun to develop a series of daily briefing materials to support continued organizational maturity around these challenging topics.

Environmental Justice (Justice40 Integration) Focus

On January 10, 2022, USDA issued a memo to agencies that provided guidance on how each mission area can effectively integrate and operationalize Justice40 (J40) implementation as part of the agency equity action plans. USDA mission areas identified J40 Covered Programs, the program benefits to drive toward underserved communities, and metrics for each program to track success. As part of this Forest Service Equity Action Plan update, the agency developed a Forest Service J40 implementation plan, which is included as appendix B of this plan. J40 is considered one of the key priorities USDA is leveraging to support the goals of Executive Order 13985 on advancing racial equity, namely, reducing barriers and increasing investments in underserved communities. The Forest Service J40 implementation plan identifies key linkages between covered programs proposed for modification and the related actions from the Forest Service Equity Action Plan.

In addition to J40 integration, the Forest Service will activate its network of environmental justice and equity subject matter experts who have led and participated in environmental justice and equity actions throughout past administrations and agency initiatives. The strategic equity roadmap may also establish strategic objectives for agency-wide environmental justice activities and investments, compliance with Executive Order 12898 regarding fair treatment and meaningful involvement of environmental justice communities, participation in and support of national environmental justice conferences, and other cross-deputy area efforts in support of justice and equity outcomes.

Future development of these actions toward a strategic roadmap effort will also acknowledge the connections between Forest Service Equity Action Plan outcomes and requirements outlined in [Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#), such as development of agency-wide climate adaptation plans. The Washington Office, Office of Sustainability and Climate (OSC) has convened a series of learning webinars to increase employee understanding of how environmental justice, climate justice, indigenous environmental justice, and equity outcomes can be met through climate adaptation and land management projects. The Forest Service will continue to increase employee awareness of these interrelated issues and integrate this Forest Service Equity Action Plan with the agency's "Climate Adaptation Plan" currently under development. Similar steps will be taken to integrate equity actions with agency efforts to address the wildfire crisis, for instance embedding equity measures in the next iteration of the ["Wildfire Crisis Implementation Plan."](#)

Next Steps

As we focus on incrementally improving these 10 actions and transitioning to a strategic equity roadmap, we are preparing a robust Tribal and Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Equity-Centered Communication Strategy to support agency-wide equitable engagement needs. The Forest Service Equity Action Plan could be modified based on recommendations and insights gathered during engagement and consultation sessions.

Equity Actions

1. Position the Agency and Tribes for Success in Expanded Costewardship

Lead: State and Private Forestry

Outcome: Build trust.

As part of the larger OTR action plan to fully meet the Forest Service's trust responsibility to Tribes, the agency is proposing a cross-deputy area strategy to integrate Tribal nations into costewardship of National Forest System lands in Indian Country. This strategy will recognize and protect Tribal treaties and other Tribal rights and interests in the National Forest System with holistic goals and a plan for success that supports Tribes and the agency in achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. This strategy will address and incorporate multiple administration equity goals, including improved trust, reduction in barriers to Tribal costewardship and collaborative work, and other opportunities for relationship building such as increasing Tribal participation in agency training and procurement. Targeted Forest Service priorities for the Justice40 Initiative also focus on greater Tribal engagement.

Actions:

- Communications and Socialization. The Forest Service has developed a costewardship strategy for expanded implementation of Tribal authorities and Justice 40 commitments, including communications and socialization for relevant staff agency-wide through continued workshops, webinars, leadership engagement, and Tribal consultation. Multiple assessments are currently underway to inform staff of extant treaty rights on the National Forest System, identify best practices and model agreements, and capture lessons learned in costewardship. The Office of Tribal Relations, in partnership with Tribes and unit staff, will continue to respond to requests for information and technical assistance through national presentations, program-specific information sessions, and one-on-one technical assistance for program and policy staff, forests and grasslands, and agency and Department leadership at the national level and in the field. Additional external workshops for staff and Tribes are also planned for FY 2023.

Planned activities include: (1) surveying Tribes and Forest Service line officers and staff to assess familiarity with Tribe/Forest Service costewardship and how they define it; (2) creating a communications plan providing for leadership presentations to the field and other means to engage in dialogue with field personnel and promote their understanding of costewardship concepts and authorities; (3) engaging Forest Service leadership in a new Tribal Nation Sovereignty and Responsibility Advisory Commission, which will elevate and prioritize Tribal relations matters at all levels of the agency in a manner that is responsive to the priorities of Tribal Nations, and (4) expanding technical assistance to Tribes and Forest Service line officers who develop Tribal authority proposals. All activities will emphasize incorporation of Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge

(ITEK) in Federal decisions. A communications plan and report of Tribal consultation and staff survey input on costewardship will be completed not later than the fourth quarter of FY 2022. Socialization and technical assistance activities that began in FY 2021 will increase in pace and scale beginning in the fourth quarter of FY 2022, based upon expansion of staff capacity. Other activities planned with expansion of staff capacity include updates to the full suite of tools and guidance currently available for Tribal authorities.

- Assessments. Several Forest Service and interagency assessments are planned or underway to: (1) analyze existing authorities to execute Tribe/Forest Service costewardship; (2) identify barriers to Tribe/Forest Service costewardship; (3) eliminate and/or modify business processes within agency discretion that create barriers for Tribal partners and applicants (e.g., flexibility and waivers per Executive Order 13175); and (4) identify opportunities to incorporate principles of self-governance in Forest Service mission-critical work, consistent with the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93–638). Initial Forest Service analyses of authorities and identification of barriers are complete, and work to modify business processes has begun in FY 2022. More in-depth analyses will occur in FY 2023 upon receipt of USDA Office of General Counsel (OGC) legal review of current land, water, and wildlife treaty responsibilities and authorities that can support costewardship as required by Joint Secretary Order 3403. A preliminary report from USDA OGC is planned for third quarter of FY 2022 and a final by the first quarter of FY 2023. A comparison of Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks with Joint Secretarial Order 3403 will also begin in FY 2023 or sooner, dependent on staff capacity.
- Guidance. The Tribe/Forest Service costewardship strategy will further provide guidance on: (1) use of line officer discretion and the spectrum of engagement opportunities; (2) best practices, tools, and models for Tribe/Forest Service costewardship based on the experience and resources of other federal land management agencies; (3) incorporation of ITEK; and (4) successes, challenges, and lessons learned. The Forest Service will adopt, revise, and/or develop pilot models and instruments as necessary to achieve success in a learning environment and update the suite of currently available tools and templates, beginning in the first quarter of FY 2023.

External Engagement: Engagement within this action is with Tribes and Tribal organizations, and with other Federal agencies serving Tribes. The primary methods are formal consultation (government-to-government) and informal engagements (Tribal forums, listening sessions, et al.). The Washington Office, Office of Tribal Relations and regional Tribal relations staff maintain a robust schedule of consultations and engagements that is based on policy revisions and requests for consultation and technical assistance. Since January 2021, the Office of Tribal Relations has hosted, cohosted, or participated in 8 formal consultations and 10 related Tribal forums and listening sessions. Additional Tribal engagement occurs monthly within two Forest Service advisory committees.

Data to Track Progress: The Forest Service currently lacks data capture and analysis on Tribal engagement. With the goal of full and successful implementation of a Tribe/Forest Service costewardship strategy, the agency has initiated an assessment to improve Forest Service data systems. Taking a holistic approach, exploration is underway to develop potential key performance indicators and an executive dashboard for this effort. Additionally, OTR is developing a logic model for benefits calculation methodology to support accountability in the Justice40 Initiative. All measures identified and/or created will serve robust monitoring and reporting on Tribe/Forest Service costewardship in a continuous improvement status. This work is part of a much larger effort by the agency to update and modify data collection and reporting systems to achieve the goals of EO 13985, Justice40, Joint Secretarial Order 3403, and Forest Service trust responsibility.

Staffing Plan: The Forest Service will invest in development of an Office of Costewardship within OTR to serve as a hub for an interdisciplinary, cross-deputy area cadre of policy staff, subject matter experts, and line officers. The current proposal to increase OTR capacity includes three additional staff focused on costewardship (a GS-14 national program manager for costewardship, a GS-13 program manager, and a GS-13 policy analyst). The OTR Office of Costewardship will be complemented by new hires focused on Tribal issues in the NFS and Business Operations deputy areas (and potentially Research and Development), as well as technical expertise from other staff units throughout the agency.

Accountability: As part of OTR's action plan, several measures are under development to capture agency progress in fulfilling trust responsibility, honoring Tribal treaties and other Tribal rights and interests in National Forest System lands, and ensuring equity in program and service delivery. Additionally, there are several reporting requirements associated with USDA and administration priorities that OTR will continue to execute, including regularly scheduled program reviews under the OTR action plan. Measures triggered by budget allocation, the Justice40 Initiative, and other mandates will be implemented by new data strategies under development and will be complemented in the short term by OTR engagement with field units and the agency's Tribal partner, the Intertribal Timber Council, to monitor status.

2. Enhance Engagement with Tribes and Underserved Communities through Culturally Relevant Strategies and DEIA-Focused Partnerships

Lead: Work Environment and Performance Office, National Forest System, Chief’s Office

Outcome: Build trust, actively look inward, reduce barriers to access, and take action.

In 2017, President Obama issued a Presidential Memorandum titled “Promoting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in our Public Lands, Forests, and Waters.” On January 20, 2021, the Biden administration issued EO 13985, which directs Federal agencies to advance racial equity and support throughout the Federal Government. The Executive order focuses on equity in mission delivery: “In carrying out this order, agencies shall consult with members of communities that have been historically underrepresented in the Federal Government and underserved by, or subject to discrimination in, Federal policies and programs. The head of each agency shall evaluate opportunities, consistent with applicable law, to increase coordination, communication, and engagement with community-based organizations and civil rights organizations.” Additional administrative direction includes the memorandum “Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships” (January 26, 2021) and Joint Secretarial Order 3403, “Fulfilling the Trust Responsibility to Indian Tribes in the Stewardship of Federal Lands and Waters” (November 15, 2021).

The future of national forests and public lands must include effective and intentional internal and external engagement with diverse communities that live by, visit, and depend on national forests. The agency can improve engagement with diverse and/or sovereign communities by understanding, and being open to learning more about, cultural connections to the land.

To fully realize the Forest Service's mission, it is imperative that members of socially disadvantaged communities and historically marginalized communities of color are included at the table and, more importantly, actively involved in developing the framework for collaboration and in decision making. As a result, the Forest Service is seeking enhanced partnerships, community engagement, and Tribal consultation that will lead to the development of equitable forest plans and programs of work that are fully informed by the ideas, insights, and perspectives of those active in conservation in diverse capacities. Working with Tribes, partners, and newcomers to the United States will allow us to address barriers and be more culturally responsive.

Actions:

- Develop agency-wide limited English proficiency (LEP) equity-centered guidance that will promote and elevate social integration and engagement across Forest Service priority mission areas. LEP guidance, in conjunction with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 education and learning resources, will be included in the “Forest Service Equity in Communication and Engagement” strategy and in the equity-centered Working Principles

Toolkit. The intent is to bridge LEP to other Forest Service priority mission areas for enhanced integration, implementation, and impact.

- Work with the Next 100 Coalition to conduct a series of activities, such as national and regional listening sessions, and discussions with coalition members and other similar DEIA-focused organizations that directly represent, and support underserved and historically marginalized communities. The overall goal of this partnership effort and others is to identify practices and opportunities to embed the commitment of DEIA into agency and departmental systems, policies, and practices. Results will help inform future engagement plans and enhance mission delivery.
- Provide an avenue of success to address barriers from partners and communities of color through listening sessions and discussions.
- Learn to address access as a systemic barrier across the Forest Service deputy areas, while listening and learning what we can from communities of color and historically marginalized communities.
- Modify the Next 100 Coalition Agreement to expand their capacity to succeed (i.e., co-funding position (e.g., The Nature Conservancy Model).
- Promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) in the Federal workforce to address systemic barriers to access and expand recruitment efforts to diversify potential applicant pools.
- Develop a “Forest Service Equity in Communication and Engagement” strategy that will highlight tools and innovative approaches to support the success of DEIA partnerships and foster sustained relationships with underrepresented communities and organizations in the achievement of the agency mission. The strategy will provide an informed approach to communication and effective community engagement best practices, as well as guidance on inclusivity, cultural competency, LEP, and equity-centered learning.
- Work collaboratively across deputy areas, regions, and stations to identify and achieve clear objectives to diversify agency partnerships nationwide and implement Tribal authorities and Joint Secretarial Order 3403. Coordinate across deputy areas and field units for more diverse, equitable, and inclusive partnerships that reach all communities in priority landscapes and activate the Forest Service Partnerships Community of Practice. Diversify agency partnerships nationwide and coordinate across deputy areas and field units for more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible partnerships that reach all communities in priority landscapes. This fully diverse coalition of partners should support the agency’s “Wildfire Crisis Strategy,” Great American Outdoors Act, ecosystem restoration, and other agency priorities.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: Tribes are distinguished from the communities listed above because of the government-to-government relationship and as such, the process for outreach and communication follows a separate process (Executive Order 13175). In addition, Joint Secretarial Order 3403 emphasizes how the Federal Government (Forest Service) will work with Tribes not just to “partner” but to fulfill our trust responsibilities to protect the treaty, religious, subsistence, and cultural interests of federally recognized Tribes. Tribal consultation and collaboration must be implemented as components of,

or in addition to, Federal land management priorities and direction for recreation; rangelands; timber and energy production; conservation of wilderness, watersheds, and wildlife habitat; and other values. The Forest Service will enter into agreements with Tribes to collaborate in this effort, not as an interested partner, but as another Government with an equal interest in the land.

Data to Track Progress:

- Within 4 months, begin implementing an engagement strategy for the action items and the agency’s broader framework for promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and access in delivery of its mission.
- Track results and learning from engagement sessions and partnerships to measure how they influence the success of the action items.

Staffing Plan:

- The National Partnership Office has requested additional staffing to include one GS-13 full-time employee (FTE), one GS-9/11 FTE, and two resource assistants or similar temporary employees to focus on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility partnerships.
- The “Forest Service Equity Road Map” will be used to determine the appropriate number of region/station/field employees needed to accomplish this action.
- Additional capacity and contributions will be identified in cooperative and other partnership agreements.

Accountability:

- Agency funding from new and existing allocations will enable activities in this action plan.
- Progress reports and community of practice updates will be provided by dedicated DEIA staff (pending agency approval of proposed staff positions).
- DEIA advancements are expected to be highlighted and reported in agency reports and progress updates.

3. Achieve a Representative, Inclusive, and Thriving Forest Service Workforce

Lead: Office of Civil Rights, National Forest System, Business Operations

Outcomes: Internal workforce strategy, build trust, and increase access to services.

- Workforce data show that the following groups are underrepresented in the Forest Service: all women, Native Americans, Asian American men, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander men, African American men, persons with disabilities, and veterans. The agency is also committed to ensuring representation of LGBTQ+ employees within the Forest Service.
- Applicant data show that candidate pools lack diversity and that potential applicants are not accessing hiring pathways and opportunities.
- Available legislative authorities for a variety of workforce development programs are implemented in a vacuum. A more cohesive and integrated approach is needed to meet staffing and capacity needs.

Actions: Fully integrate and prioritize hiring authorities under the [Resource Assistants Program](#) (RAP), Job Corps, [Public Lands Corps](#) (PLC), and the proposed Minority Serving Institution Scholars Program to significantly increase successful placements of underrepresented employees to meet near- and long-term hiring needs.

The overall success of this action depends on a national commitment to lead results for these programs. Key to this effort is taking an integrated, accountable, wholistic approach that results in high-quality, rigorous, and diverse workforce development opportunities and training experiences; streamlines administrative procedures and creates efficiencies; and serves all deputy areas and offices. Actions and objectives to achieve these goals would include:

- Developing and implementing a data-driven, agency-wide, workforce strategy focused on entry-level positions, including those needed to implement the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and applicable EOs.
- Consolidating all national-level, third-party internship programs using RAP and PLC hiring authorities as a service hub for all agency workforce development partnerships. Create a category in agency outreach notices that identifies potential eligibility for these candidates and connects currently certified RAP/PLC participants and Job Corps graduates to national, entry-level hiring events to accelerate hiring of needed staff.
- Merging third-party internship programs, including the proposed Forest Service Minority Serving Institution Scholars Program, 1890 and 1994 Tribal Scholars Programs, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities Internship Program, Thurgood Marshall College Fund Internship Program, Conference on Asian Pacific American Leadership Internship Program, the Resource Assistant Program, and the Public Land Corps, into a single, new Students and Emerging Professionals (SEP) Program.

- Emphasizing accountability through reporting and annual performance objectives and expand training and technical assistance to attract applicants from underrepresented populations.
- Increasing Tribal engagement in youth conservation programs through hiring and expanded training programs related to the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, other Congressional legislation, and administration priorities.
- Pursuing U.S. Office of Personnel Management approval of direct hire authority for Job Corps graduates for all applicable entry-level positions graded GS-03, GS-04, or GS-05.
- Creating USAJobs.gov announcements targeting SEP candidates with the requisite knowledge, skills, and abilities for specific job series.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: Developing and promoting a single source for all of the hiring tools available to hire Indigenous people, including the USDA hiring protocols for Tribal relations positions, will ensure that they are fully considered for positions with the Forest Service. In addition to the programs targeted at youth and students described above, the Forest Service should incorporate direct hire authorities and procedures from the Intergovernmental Personnel Act into our standard hiring practices. It's particularly important to target hiring opportunities for Tribal members in their communities and not expect that providing opportunity on a national level will suffice. Hiring Indigenous people in their communities provides an opportunity for both the Tribe and the Forest Service to make a deep connection around Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge (ITEK).

This equity action aligns with the OTR action to expand Forest Service Tribal relations staffing and capacity. Staff capacity in Tribal relations is critical to meet our Federal trust responsibility and requires that our corporate resume includes a cadre of staff with the requisite skills to develop and maintain substantive Tribal relations. Additionally, the equity action plan and the OTR action plan position the agency and Tribes for success in expanded costewardship offers opportunities for Tribal training to either enter a Forest Service career or to build capacity for Tribal enterprises that can accomplish mission critical work on the National Forest System under contract or agreement.

Data to Track Progress: Within 3 months, the Forest Service will develop, evaluate, and recommend an integrated, accountable, whole-agency approach under a Youth Workforce Partnerships Directorate and that results in high-quality, rigorous, and diverse workforce development program opportunities and training experiences; streamline administrative procedures and create efficiencies; and serve all deputy areas and offices. The Youth Workforce Partnerships Directorate will coordinate third-party conservation corps programs, while the Job Corps program will continue to mobilize and train underrepresented youth toward employment in conservation related fields.

Within 6 months of establishment of the Youth Workforce Partnerships Directorate, a 5-year strategic plan with annual performance goals related to outreach and hiring will be established, tracked, and reported to leadership annually for input and adjustments as needed.

- An Office of Management and Budget (OMB)-approved workforce development participant information collection request will enable participating agencies to capture required and other information that will aid in workforce development and job training for young people, returning veterans, and others who are unemployed or underemployed and in monitoring compliance with applicable law and EOs. The Forest Service is the owner of this form and has initiated reapproval of the form, which expired February 28, 2022.
- The VSPortal, deployed recently for 2022 reporting, will require all workforce development partners to enter data about individuals engaged through their partnerships with the Forest Service. Existing and robust data is available in real time for the Job Corps program.
- Near-Term (6–12 months): Determine which data will best suit program needs, which data to prioritize, and the best methods for collecting the data. In consultation with OGC, the NRE privacy officer, and USDA’s cybersecurity office, establish new data collection and storage protocols as appropriate. Within this timeframe, the Job Corps program will have an internal outreach and admissions contract in place to recruit and enroll diverse students into the program.
- Near-Term (6-12 months): Target communications about new and existing agency hiring opportunities to underserved communities through public-facing websites populated with the latest human resources outreach, recruiting, and retention data. Work with the agency’s chief data officer and the chief information officer (CIO) to connect recruitment, hiring, retention, and turnover data with demographics to enable gap analysis in hiring and to introduce targeted actions to mitigate issues across recruitment, hiring, and retention. Identify data performance metrics to track program status through the creation of information dashboards.
- Maturity Model—Long-Term Potential Actions: Fully integrate artificial intelligence (AI) capabilities into the agency’s hiring toolsets and data repositories to diversify the agency’s workforce. A well-designed AI system will provide an unbiased overview of an applicant’s skills and abilities, ensuring that every agency candidate will have an equitable opportunity to be hired. AI will also be used to identify bias in job descriptions, hiring patterns, performance reviews and will be leveraged to streamline hiring timeframes with an automated resume review process.

Staffing Plan: The Washington Office (WO) Youth Workforce Partnerships Directorate would serve as a service hub supporting all deputy areas and working in concert with region, station, and area liaisons. We propose a team of 15 staff, described below:

- One GS-15 director to provide leadership and supervisory oversight to the program managers and other staff.
- One GS-14 program manager to oversee the SEP program and supervise program managers.
- Two GS-13 multicultural workforce strategic initiative (MWSI) partnership coordinators.
- One GS-13 RAP coordinator.
- Two GS-7/9/11 program specialists to support the SEP program.

- One GS-14 operations manager to supervise a team of support staff for agreements and other business operations and a communications and outreach specialist.
- Three GS-13 program managers to coordinate crew-based and internships projects for the Civilian Climate Corps, PLC, Youth Conservation Corps, Indian Youth Service Corps and SPF and R&D workforce development partnerships.
- One GS-12/13 training and education specialist to support the crew-based project manager and other staff as appropriate.
- One GS-11/12 communications and outreach specialist.
- One GS-12/13 evaluation, data, and reporting analyst.
- One GS-12/13 Tribal liaison.

Within the Forest Service Job Corps Directorate:

- GS-13 program manager to coordinate crew-based and internship projects
- GS-7/9/11 program specialist to support student learning and recruiting program

Accountability: Once approved, the Youth Workforce Partnerships Advisory Council and the existing chartered Job Corps Advisory Board will include agency leaders from all deputy areas, leaders from certain organizations, and the Youth Workforce Partnerships and Job Corps directors. The Advisory Council will ensure leadership intent and strategic priorities for workforce development programming are aligned and effectively implemented. Accountability for increasing cooperation and cohesion among the Forest Service deputy areas and other offices for the delivery of integrated workforce development and youth training experiences will be collaborative and will be based on a holistic approach.

4. Institutionalize the Onboarding Experience for New Employees

Lead: Work Environment and Performance Office, Business Operations, Chief Financial Officer

Outcome: Develop and implement a national workforce strategy.

Recruiting and retaining high-quality, diverse talent are critical to accomplishing the agency's mission. Workforce data for FY 2021 show 30 percent of new employees are leaving the agency in the first 3 years of their onboarding. Based on extensive surveys, focus groups, and conversations with employees, supervisors, and subject matter experts, the Forest Service identified significant challenges in delivering a consistent, well-structured onboarding experience that would ensure strong performance, a sense of belonging and inclusion, preparation to perform well, and retention from every demographic and in every unit.

Action: The New Hire Experience Strategy and Program supports employees by creating a safe environment, integrating them fully into the workforce with a strong connection to the agency's mission, giving them tools to be successful, and recognizing their efforts. The agency provisionally launched this program in 2019 and succeeded in improving transparency and engagement in the onboarding process. The agency is continuing to invest in the program as a critical tool for shifting the structure of the agency's workforce and how the agency accomplishes its mission. New hires desire a relationship-based, interpersonal approach, closer communication, and better support from service providers and need a clear iteration of duties and expectations before they start work. This equity action fully commits to the New Hire Experience Strategy and Program with permanent funding, staffing, and structures that will perpetuate its benefits, which support a diverse, inclusive, and thriving workforce. The New Hire Experience Strategy identifies multiple objectives and actions to implement the New Hire Experience Program in the Forest Service fully and permanently.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: As with any new employee, mentorship and a real orientation to the culture and resources of the Forest Service will lead to success. In particular, making sure that the new employee does not have a sense of isolation is critical. Mentors will also have the opportunity to improve their understanding of Tribal culture and worldviews through their interactions with new employees.

This equity action aligns with two OTR actions: education and training and youth engagement. OTR will develop a three-tier training curriculum for Tribal Relations and Tribal consultation competencies for Forest Service staff. Engagement of American Indian and Alaska Native youth will be facilitated by OTR to expand opportunities in service learning, including in collaboration with the U.S. Department of the Interior's Indian Youth Service Corps, and other career pathways.

Data to Track Progress:

- Near-Term (6–12 months): Determine which data will best suit program needs, which data to prioritize, and the best methods to collect them. In consultation with OGC, the

NRE privacy officer, and USDA's cybersecurity office, establish new DEIA data collection and storage protocols, as appropriate.

- Maturity Model—Long-Term Potential Actions: Fully integrate AI capabilities into our ecosystem of onboarding and orientation toolsets.

Staffing Plan: The program is currently operated by collateral duty staff from various business support functions, along with contract personnel. To establish an onboarding program that is positioned to meet the agency's equity and inclusion objectives for its growing employee population and changing work environment, the Forest Service is recommending adding the following dedicated staff to the program:

- Program manager (GS-14)
- Onboarding liaisons (three GS-9/11/12s)
- Public affairs specialist (GS-12/13)
- Content coordinator (GS-12/13)

Accountability: Outcomes will be tracked as identified in the New Hire Experience (NHE) Strategy and Program and will be supported by a national program leader from the Work Environment and Performance Office, in collaboration with Business Operations, the chief financial officer, the NHE Champions and Leadership Cadre, and Job Corps.

5. Increase Equity in Opportunities for Small and Disadvantaged Businesses in Delivering the Forest Service's Mission

Lead: Business Operations

Outcomes: Increase participation by small and disadvantaged businesses in the agency's procurement program, invest in underserved communities, reduce barriers to access, and build trust.

The Forest Service is a leader in maximizing small business participation and has consistently done so for over a decade. Historically, over 80 percent of the agency's total annual business expenditures, averaging \$1.2 billion, involve small businesses. As the largest USDA agency with one of the largest contracting portfolios, the Forest Service created a team dedicated to small business outreach and compliance. The team includes a small business specialist (serving as the lead) and small business coordinators (SBCs). The team's duties include coordinating, tracking, and managing successful delivery of the small and disadvantaged business program. To ensure equity in contracting and procurement opportunities, the agency will evaluate current program performance, identify barriers and opportunities to improve participation, and take legally supportable actions to improve outcomes within the underserved SDB community.

The USDA 200-day report revealed that of the \$3 billion in USDA business spending from 2011 to 2021, \$2.4 billion benefitted white small and disadvantaged businesses (SDBs), and \$600 million benefitted SDBs representing Asian, Latin, African American, and Native Americans combined. The Forest Service will make affirmative changes to lessen the gap in economic benefits and to improve participation from underrepresented and socially disadvantaged communities in delivering the agency's mission via \$1.2 billion in annual business expenditures.

Actions:

- Assess current and historical data to identify contributions that have resulted from business funding in the Forest Service's SDB Contracting Program. This program accounts for 80 percent of agency contract spending.
- Through research, direct engagement, and Tribal consultation, further assess the specific barriers faced among the diverse minority, veteran, socially disadvantaged, and underrepresented SDBs.
- Through collaboration with other USDA mission areas and others, identify best practices for increasing economic benefits to underserved groups from agency business expenditures.
- Through Tribal and stakeholder engagement, identify barriers that have resulted in lack of participation or success in award of contracts to underserved SDBs.
- Identify policy, process, and capacity-building actions and changes needed to address barriers to participation in Forest Service procurement opportunities.
- Build trust with underserved SDBs through a strong commitment to recurring vendor outreach efforts at the national and local levels. These efforts will include industry days, small business match-making sessions, requests for information, and other localized outreach efforts to underserved SDBs.

- Initiate a pilot program to increase outreach to underserved SDBs.
 - Establish up to four additional SBC positions in the agency’s four procurement zones to communicate with local underserved SDBs and attend local SDB events.
 - Conduct targeted, local outreach to underserved communities.
 - Answer correspondence and host individual outreach sessions with an emphasis on underserved SDBs.
 - Assist with agency reporting and metric tracking of participation by underserved SDBs.
 - The lead will:
 - Assist with identifying outreach events for program participation.
 - Provide information and resources for program execution.
 - Assist with outreach and communication efforts.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: With additional administration and agency prioritization of Tribal sovereignty, treaty rights, and costewardship as outlined in Joint Secretarial Order 3403, it is incumbent on Forest Service procurement actions to call out authorities and opportunities to contract with Tribes, in addition to any small and disadvantaged business set asides. An example is the authority to noncompetitively contract for work under an approved Tribal Forest Protection Act (TFPA) proposal.

This equity action aligns with OTR action to position the agency and Tribes for success in expanded costewardship and with Joint Secretarial Order 3403, which requires analysis of all barriers to Tribal opportunity in statute and policy. Accountability will thus include a measure of the degree the Forest Service addresses policy and business process barriers within the agency’s discretion to remedy.

Data to Track Progress:

- Complete an analysis of participation to determine where contracting and procurement benefits are being delivered to underserved SDBs.
- Design and implement an engagement strategy to learn about barriers to access and opportunities for program improvement from current participants.
- Conduct research to learn about policy, process, and performance actions and changes that could be considered to increase economic benefits and inclusion through Forest Service contracting and procurement activities.
- Identify and further evaluate recommended changes to policy, process, and performance that increase equity in opportunities for underserved SDBs to help deliver the Forest Service’s mission.
- Identify core courses to provide a basic understanding of the role of SBCs.
- Track progress via the Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU)’s annual report of agencies’ award goals versus agency awards made, as well as via appropriate USDA dashboards.
- Work with the chief data officer and the CIO to capture program accomplishments and performance measures and convert those data into demographics, thereby allowing for

gap analysis of the program and identification of targeted actions to mitigate issues for underserved SDBs.

- Explore integration of AI into the program.

Staffing Plan:

- Procurement analysts working in the field have recently been designated as SBCs, but this role augments their preexisting duties.
- The addition of four GS-12/13 small business coordinators who are dedicated to underserved SDB outreach would allow for a more focused initiative that would build long-term relationships with underserved SDBs. One SBC would be assigned to each of the agency's four procurement zones.
- The lead will oversee, monitor, and assist with implementation and execution of the Small and Disadvantaged Business Contracting Program with an emphasis on increasing vendor outreach and education.

Accountability:

- An internal control plan will be implemented to assess annual progress.
- Goals for underserved SDBs will be incorporated into procurement leaders' annual performance plans.
- Progress toward goals will be monitored monthly through internal tracking and via the OSDBU's interim and annual reports, as well as via appropriate USDA dashboards.

6. Increase Equity and Access in the Grants and Agreements Program in Delivering the Forest Service's Mission

Lead: Business Operations

Outcomes: Increase equitable access to grants and agreements, increase awards and opportunities to small and historically underinvested communities, and empower underrepresented communities through collaborative engagements and mentorship programs.

The Office of Grants and Agreements (OGA) values the importance of mutual collaborative efforts between national, Tribal, regional, and local partners who offer their commitment, expertise, diversity of backgrounds and experiences to assist in delivering conservation services to the public. In 2021, OGA awarded \$1.1 billion of grants and agreements to over 3,500 partners, about a 35 percent increase from the prior fiscal year. This increase is projected to continue for the upcoming year. As such, OGA recognizes its paramount importance to ensure these award opportunities are accessible and equitably distributed to underrepresented communities.

Actions:

- Expand pool of partners: OGA intends to collaborate with the National Partnership Office, internal program areas, and external entities (where possible) to increase accessibility and diversity in our pool of partners. OGA seeks to develop innovative outreach strategies to accomplish this goal. These outreach strategies can include: (1) creating a new intuitive digital platform to promote outreach opportunities; (2) performing outreach targeting untapped geographical areas; conducting industry sessions to increase visibility; (3) architecting set-aside projects to target underrepresented communities; and (4) considering the use of competition for funding.
 - In addition to Federally Recognized Tribes and Alaskan Native Corporations, possible priority areas and metrics to consider include: the CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index; the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE); minority-serving institutions; and programs whose primary audience includes populations such as people with disabilities, senior citizens, immigrants or refugees, individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP), military families, or unemployed individuals.
 - OGA staff will conduct a review of current unliquidated obligations (ULOs) to inform any possible strategies for creating set-aside projects, as mentioned above.
 - It is not currently possible to report in-depth on the audiences served and outcomes achieved through grants and agreements. To gain this capability, OGA will develop OMB-approved forms to collect this information, with the intention that the forms will become required elements of competitive and noncompetitive awards. These forms will be created with input from agency partners.
- Implement an Access Storefront branch: This branch will provide a customer service help desk experience to external partners. It will act as a centralized, externally facing

resource for prospective partners, with a focus on underrepresented communities. The Access Storefront responds to the need to provide a pathway for the informational and procedural literacy that is required of anyone seeking to do business with the Forest Service. Access Storefront will assist external partners in the navigation of the pre-award and post award phase of grants and agreements. This consists of developing technical and budget proposals, connecting and navigating other systems, applying for opportunities, and project monitoring, management, and closeout. This resource is intended to serve as the “You Are Here” for an organization starting to find their way with the Forest Service. It is intended that the Access Storefront will complement the services provided by the National Partnership Office (NPO), Enterprise teams, and field units.

- Promote awareness in project opportunities: Launch an internal site aiming at empowering Forest Service program managers (PMs) with tools and resources. This site will act as a community forum where program managers can share information, knowledge, expertise, and experiences while allowing Access Storefront the opportunity to connect possible projects with external partners. PMs will be able to share and outreach their project opportunities within their community and with Access Storefront. The Access Storefront team will also provide guidance and assistance to ease the administrative burden from PM.
- Develop education, certification, and mentorship programs: The Access Storefront team will explore various educational and mentorship programs for underrepresented communities to help expand capacity, develop new skills, and build experiences. For example, connect established partners with up-and-coming partners or a “buddy” program, where partners are matched based on their level of skills, experiences, and capacity to gain a system of community support. OGA believes that an education/certification program is an investment that will have an impact in helping these communities to attract and retain their equity. It is an empowerment tool that could foster a positive beneficial outcome in the long run.
- Establish working group: Earlier this year, the Washington Office (WO) OGA staff and the National Partnership Office launched a working group that will review and provide collaborative recommendations on issues affecting project implementation as well as obstacles to establishing partnerships. A series of six topics will be addressed by targeted subteams, with two operational at one time. During the second and third quarters of FY 2022, the first subteam will focus on cooperator matching requirements, both in statute and in policy, and identifying flexibilities to the extent consistent with applicable law. Consistent with equity action 2 of this plan related to engaging Tribes and underserved communities, the second subteam will collaboratively develop recommendations to expand the pool of partners with respect to capacity to participate and equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in distribution of agency resources.
 - As a complement to the above, the WO OGA liaison to NPO will engage with NPO staff to collaboratively review the current public Forest Service website to identify possible enhancements in the short-term. While several actions identified in this plan will significantly improve and expand information available to the public

concerning the landscape of funding at the agency, staff will work collaboratively to institute a stopgap improvement.

- Promote Tribal relations: WO OGA leadership meets with Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) leadership on a monthly basis to share information and address issues of mutual concern. In addition, the WO OGA policy branch is hiring a Tribal relations policy analyst, who will coordinate all efforts that involve Tribal interests and communities and will be the subject matter expert on the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act and the Tribal Forest Protection Act. The Tribal policy analyst will additionally conduct an internal review of existing OGA policy to identify any barriers to Tribal participation in OGA processes, policies, and procedures, including Tribal match waivers.
 - OGA has initiated Tribal consultation as it pertains to Forest Service Handbook chapter updates. OGA will be documenting a standardized procedure for ensuring Tribal consultation is integrated into the chapter update process.
- Increase equity in research funding: WO OGA will initiate discussions with key program partners internal to the agency to assess current practices and identify capabilities for an expansion similar to that of the Established Program to Stimulate Competitive Research (EPSCoR). EPSCoR was founded in response to concern over the uneven distribution of Federal research and development grants. WO OGA will explore the capability to instill an EPSCoR-like methodology within its existing authorities. If these efforts are successful, the WO OGA will engage with the Department, which is a member of the EPSCoR Interagency Coordinating Committee (EICC), to identify how Forest Service funding opportunities can be competitively awarded or otherwise directed towards States that have been historically underfunded in the research and development arena.
- Modernize grants and agreements processes: OGA is presently undertaking critical modernization efforts to remove a costly dependency on outdated systems, which will result in significant cost savings for the Forest Service. As a subsequent element of these modernization efforts, OGA will deploy a streamlined and modernized application capability and process that underserved and underrepresented communities can easily access and use, including tracking agency approval or denial of awards and the Forest Service's progress in increasing access to agency programs. These steps will help increase application volume and level the competition between established partners and those which are historically underserved or underrepresented without heavy reliance on additional technical assistance.
 - OGA will review Natural Resource Manager (NRM) data capabilities and identify opportunities for enhancement. With use of existing capabilities within Tableau dashboards, OGA can identify needs gaps in our data, including the dimensions of finance and performance. OGA will also work with internal agency partners to identify opportunities to share this data with the public. Improving access to this data will strengthen the Forest Service's ability to demonstrate its impact and value to external partners and to Congress.

- Any geospatial enhancement efforts pertaining to OGA will be completed in cooperation, where applicable, to efforts outlined in equity action 7 of this plan related to wildfire risk reduction to Tribes and underserved communities.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: Establishing a policy position dedicated to Tribal grants and agreements work will provide the attention and focus necessary to meet the direction in Joint Secretarial Order 3403 regarding costewardship. Ensuring that there is a mechanism to accurately track all grants, agreements, and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with Tribes will provide for accountability in reporting the Forest Service’s progress. Development of appropriate resources and technical assistance specifically tailored for Tribes will distinguish the government-to-government relationship that is one of a fellow sovereign, and not that of another “partner.”

This equity action aligns with the OTR action to position the agency and Tribes for success in expanded costewardship and with Joint Secretarial Order 3403, which requires analysis of all barriers to Tribal opportunity in statute and policy. Accountability will thus include a measure of the degree the Forest Service addresses policy and business process barriers within the agency’s discretion to remedy. As the collaborative efforts described above continue to develop, engagement with Tribes and the public is likely and will be shared accordingly. At such time that OGA initiates any above actions which include the modification of policy, the offering of new resources external to the agency, or the collection of feedback, OGA will work with OTR to ensure timely Tribal consultation. Refer to the “Accountability” section below for more information regarding engagement.

Data to Track Progress

- Near-Term (6–12 months)
 - Identify specific goals to improve representation of underrepresented communities in Forest Service partnership agreements, including tracking financial benefits, types of contributions, and frequency of engagement.
 - Identify mechanisms to identify potential bias in selecting awardees/partners and streamline the review and award process.
 - By second quarter of FY 2022, have a Tribal relations policy analyst onboard.
 - Begin comprehensive assessment and review of existing policies and procedures that may act as barriers to Tribal nations.
 - Assemble Access Storefront branch; develop program charter; implement short-term goals.
 - Initiate cross-functional team to review and recommend methodologies in collecting, building, and merging of existing data, if any, of underrepresented communities.
- Midterm (1–2 years)
 - Create a community forum site for program managers to share project opportunities.
 - Track data on the types of entities seeking information via the Access Storefront.

- Track data on the organizational entities who collaborate on responses to inquiries, thus establishing a feedback loop within the Forest Service.
- Review Access Storefront data in comparison to successful award and agreement data, to demonstrate the efficacy of Access Storefront.
- Use Access Storefront data in data-driven decision making around the use of awards for training opportunities.
- Initiate collection of user stories and requirements to form foundation of consolidated OGA ecosystem.
- Long-Term (3–5 years)
 - As an element of the ongoing G&A modernization efforts, fully deploy the accessible and streamlined application capability and process.

Staffing Plan

- In FY 2021, WO OGA staff assessed current human resources and began requesting additional positions. The Forest Service is hiring to accommodate existing and future workload. WO OGA staff is also working with Forest Service regions and stations to ensure that they are fully staffed via a national hiring strategy.
- Supporting the Access Storefront will require an additional four to five staff.
 - To initiate the development of education, certification, and mentorship programs, an additional two permanent staff would be required. In addition, OGA will seek short-term details or internships to support the growth of these resources.
- OGA proposes hiring an additional four to five staff to support the significant amount of data tracking, analysis, reporting, and modeling outlined in the above action plan. Two data analysts will be tasked with supporting the geospatial data requirements outlined in this action item.
- As many actions above are exploratory or developmental in nature, additional staffing is anticipated as progress continues.
- OGA will collaborate with existing programs at the agency which engage with minority-serving institutions to increase internal workforce diversity and inclusion.

Accountability

- Assign a GS-14 project manager to lead the Access Storefront.
- Assign a permanent GS-13 project manager who will be responsible for tracking milestones for achieving this equity action.
- Provide for regular Tribal engagement, in addition to stakeholder engagement, to ensure that progress towards the actions outlined above can be publicly transparent.
- A stakeholder engagement plan and reporting methodology will be developed following the assignment of the above-mentioned project manager. The stakeholder engagement plan will be shared with OTR prior to finalization to ensure timely Tribal consultation is embedded in the plan.

7. Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribal, Underserved, and Socially Vulnerable Communities

Lead: National Forest System, State and Private Forestry

Outcome: Implementation of the Justice40 Initiative and environmental justice objectives.

- Wildfires can result in damage to the landscape, leading to displacement from socially and culturally valued lands, health-related effects, and the loss of life, property, and socially and culturally valued resources.
- Postfire impacts from displacement, flooding, loss of economic opportunity, and other damage continue to impact communities far beyond the fire itself. Postfire restoration and recovery needs are expansive and can compound the inordinate impacts on socially vulnerable communities that are less able to recover from wildfire-related disasters.
- The Forest Service is implementing a national, long-term effort to significantly change the impacts of wildfires on communities.
- With increasing incidence of wildfires and increased hazardous fuels treatments, it will be even more important to strive to help economically and socially vulnerable communities prepare for the effects of smoke, including promoting their awareness of the risks associated with smoke and know how to mitigate their exposure.
- Recent third-party research demonstrates that wealthier, whiter communities are more likely to receive hazardous fuels treatments following wildfire events in the West. Other research demonstrates that Hispanic communities in the West are disproportionately exposed and vulnerable to wildfire.
- Economically and socially vulnerable communities are more at risk to impacts of wildfire and fire-related smoke and postfire impacts, which will continue to be exacerbated by climate change.
- Reducing wildfire risk to communities is a covered program under the agency's Justice40 Initiative. The agency will address avenues to increase hazardous fuel treatments to reduce wildfire risk.
- All actions proposed herein focus on reducing risk, mitigating barriers, and promoting support of and engagement with both underserved and disadvantaged communities, as defined in Executive Orders 13985 and 14008, which includes Native Americans, Indigenous communities, and Tribes.

Actions:

- Develop national consistent spatial data and maps of economically and socially vulnerable communities in proximity to all National Forest System lands based on the best available science and data. Leverage this information to avoid disproportionate harm to these communities and foster a data-driven approach to helping vulnerable communities receive equitable benefits from hazardous fuels management, development of community wildfire protection plans, indoor air quality monitoring, active suppression measures, and emergency response support during wildfire events. Where possible, leverage models of downstream and downwind impacts from wildfire events to identify

the geographic extent of these impacts and relative proximity to economically and socially vulnerable communities. We will be collaborating with adjacent Federal landowners and sovereign nations as we pursue this work on demographic mapping. Building local relationships to support this collaborative work will be critical.

- Promote the integration of these maps and demographic data into the Scenario Investment Planning Platform, the Fireshed Registry, and other relevant models to ensure demographic variables are considered during tradeoff analysis, priority setting, and decision making.
- Promote and leverage existing research on the unique experiences, priorities, and needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities related to wildfire preparedness, fuels management, and postfire recovery. Also research the relative effectiveness of our efforts to serve, engage, consider, and benefit these communities. Integrate insights from this research, including insights from traditional ecological knowledge, into environmental analysis and decision making. Leveraging research-based insights, develop engagement and communication tools, as well as training opportunities, targeted to underserved and socially vulnerable communities and establish protocols for recruiting members of these communities to work for and with our agency.
- Develop and implement training to increase workforce preparedness to recognize and address the unique needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities to promote effective communication before and during prescribed burning and wildfires; community wildfire preparedness; indoor air quality preparedness; engagement in environmental analysis and decision making related to fire management; and equity in emergency response.
- Conduct a barrier analysis of current agency protocols, requirements, certifications, and procedures that limit underserved and socially vulnerable communities' access to prevention, mitigation, and suppression-related services, funding, and equipment. Seek to address and resolve these barriers to access.
- Develop and implement trainings for Tribal governments and communities to promote information sharing about and access to Federal granting and agreement opportunities to support communities with wildfire preparedness, smoke preparedness, and postfire recovery. Provide technical assistance (such as a process navigator) to socially and economically vulnerable communities as they apply for these grant and agreement opportunities.
- Recruit, hire, and train one to two people per region to focus on engagement with underserved and socially vulnerable communities. These staff would serve as engagement specialists focused on working directly with communities on all aspects of reducing wildfire risk, writing grants, providing recruiting opportunities for diversity, and supporting the creation of new locally owned business in utilizing fuel reduction biomass materials, fuel reduction, and home wildfire mitigation.
- To the extent consistent with applicable law, strive to reduce cooperator matching requirements for agency programs focused on hazardous fuels management and landscape restoration to ensure financial barriers are not an impediment to low-income communities accessing these competitive funding opportunities.

External Engagement:

- Successful stakeholder engagement surrounding program modifications proposed herein will be contingent on strong leadership intent and guidance at all levels of the agency. This will also take long-term commitment to making sure this intent is durable. Doing so will require acknowledgement and openness of where we are today (in terms of considering equity in our fire response and preparedness work) and will take time, effort, and strong intent to be successful.
 - National: At the national level, we will engage national organizations and key partners (e.g., National Association of State Foresters) and Federal partners to inform policy changes proposed herein, including removing match requirements in grants (where feasible), developing performance metrics for leadership, commitment to funding this effort, etc.
 - Regional: At the regional level, we will engage regional groups, such as the Western Governors Associations, State governments, Tribes with broad geographic scope and Tribal consortiums/Tribal organizational bodies about the program modifications and priorities proposed herein.
 - Local: At the local level, we will engage local and adjacent stakeholders and landowners, including Federal agencies, State governments, private landowners, Tribal members and governments, and special interest groups about the program modifications and priorities proposed herein.
- All engagements at the regional and local level would be focused on relationship building and coordination. We will also focus on engaging with trusted individuals within Tribal communities/governments and local stakeholder groups to promote effective communication and trust-building. Ideally, stakeholder engagements at these levels would be promoted and supported by individuals who are hired from local communities and Tribes, or who are trusted entities within these communities.

Data to Track Progress:

- Near-Term (6–12 months): Develop nationally consistent demographic maps of economically and socially vulnerable communities in proximity to National Forest System lands. Superimpose recent fuels treatment layers from databases (e.g., the FACTS or Infrastructure database) with these maps to develop a baseline understanding of how the agency distributes fire and fuels management work across demographic groups. Identify avenues for building national and regional leadership's commitment to integrate demographic data in decision-support tools and decision making related to implementation of fire and fuels management. Conduct a barrier analysis of current agency protocols, requirements, certifications, and procedures that limit underserved and socially vulnerable communities' access to prevention, mitigation, and suppression-related services, funding, and equipment. Develop employee training on the needs of underserved and socially vulnerable communities for fire and fuels management staff. To the extent consistent with applicable law, explore reducing cooperator matching requirements for competitive funding opportunities related to wildfire risk reduction.

Recruit and hire the five Washington Office employees to support the goals of this work in the short-term and develop and implement the program in the mid- and long-term.

- Midterm (2–4 years): Implement employee training on the needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities for fire and fuels management staff. Develop a nationally consistent strategy, with flexibility to address local conditions, for integrating demographic data and the unique needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities into fire and fuels management procedures and community wildfire preparedness processes. Integrate consideration of and engagement with economically and socially vulnerable communities into strategic planning concerning smoke mitigation and preparedness for the effects of smoke. Following the barrier analysis, address barriers in our protocols, requirements, and certifications that limit socially and economically vulnerable communities' access to agency services, funding, and equipment. To the extent consistent with applicable law, explore reducing cooperator matching requirements for competitive funding opportunities related to wildfire risk reduction. Identify avenues for expanding opportunities for economically and socially vulnerable communities to engage in implementation of fuels management projects. Recruit and hire one to two employees per region who are Tribal members or from economically and socially vulnerable communities to support training and local community engagement.
- Maturity Model—Potential future actions: Consistently collect and track data on the distribution of fuels and fire management across demographics. Complete and implement yearly performance measures. Evaluate and improve education, training, data, and analysis resources and processes developed to support this work. Implement, with flexibility to address local conditions, a nationally consistent strategy for integrating demographic data and the unique needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities into fire and fuels management programs and community wildfire preparedness processes. Conduct an external review of the program to determine the effectiveness of the program and make program modification recommendations.

Staffing Plan:

- Implementing this strategy at the WO level would require a program manager (GS-13) and four additional staff (these would be new hires), including a social scientist, geospatial/demographic analysts, engagement specialists, and communication specialists. These staff would sit in WO Fire & Aviation Management, which would coordinate with the deputy chief areas of State and Private Forestry and National Forest System or be assigned directly under an associate deputy chief to help maintain program relevance over time.
 - Increases in capacity described above would be critical for supporting the regions and building capacity specifically to:
 - Increase access to relevant skills in social sciences and demography.
 - Develop demographic maps and implement performance metric analysis.
 - Develop training and educational resources for agency staff.
 - Develop procedural guidance and engagement/communication tools for considering the needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities

during environmental analysis, decision making, and implementation of agency actions.

- In each region, one engagement specialist and one community communication specialist would be needed, in addition to a Tribal liaison (as needed for Tribal community preparedness and fire response).
 - The agency would strive to hire within local communities and underserved populations to represent the demographics of local populations and diversify the workforce.
 - The agency's priority is for regional equity-focused staff to:
 - Support effective engagement and communication with economically and socially vulnerable communities.
 - Implement training on the needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities.
 - Provide technical and educational support on mitigations actions to reduce the risk from wildfire.
 - Evaluate whether cooperator matching requirements may be reduced under applicable law.
 - Support agency diversity requirement for positions at all levels of the agency.
 - Collaborate with other agencies in creating locally owned business opportunities in reducing wildfire risk to communities.
- To promote community engagement and trust-building, we will build a staffing plan (that has co-benefits to other agency programs) that promotes hiring from within underserved and socially vulnerable communities.

Accountability:

- Ensure leadership is committed to holding staff accountable for considering the needs of economically and socially vulnerable communities during decision making, management planning, and fire management. Ensure compliance by developing and implementing the following performance metrics:
 - Within 1 year, hire the WO staff to support this action plan.
 - Within 2–3 years, develop and implement hazardous fuels treatments performance metrics on reducing wildfire exposure of economically and socially vulnerable communities. Hire one to two engagement specialists in each region.
 - Within 5 years, draft, pilot, and evaluate line officer (decision-maker) performance metrics related to wildfire risk reduction that benefits economically and socially vulnerable communities. Complete an independent, external review of the program's effectiveness and provide recommendations for future program improvements.

8. Expand Cooperative Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities

Lead: State and Private Forestry

Outcome: Invest in underserved communities, reduce barriers to access, and build trust.

The Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program is a competitive grant program that funds collaborative restoration of priority forest landscapes identified in State forest action plans. Desired outcomes include reduced wildfire risk, improved fish and wildlife habitat, improved water quality, and mitigation of invasive species, insect infestation, and disease. Projects must be conducted on rural, nonindustrial, private forest land, Tribal lands, or State forest land.

Actions:

- Receive legal determination from OGC regarding eligibility of Tribal land held in trust. (pending)
- Characterize FY 2022 regional funding recommendations with respect to equity. Announce/communicate grant awards with the Office of Communication. (pending FY 2022 appropriations)
- Conduct baseline geospatial analysis of past projects to understand program performance through equity lens. (February/March 2022)
- Consider issuing set-aside requests for proposals (RFPs) announcing FY 2023 availability of funding, to precede three regional RFPs specially targeting Tribal and minority applicants. Coordinate feasibility with SPF leadership, OGC, and OTR. (February/March 2022)
- Based on an understanding of major barriers to participation, issue FY 2023 RFPs (West, South, and Northeast/Midwest) that highlight equity considerations. (spring 2022)
- Based on revised directive Forest Service Manual 3800, coupled with annual program guidance, the three regional competitive processes (South, West, and Northeast/Midwest) will integrate equity into proposal scoring and guidance and prioritize discretionary points for underserved communities. This includes addressing barriers to participation such as cooperator matching requirements, to the extent consistent with applicable law; lack of communication or engagement with underserved clients; and obstacles to participation in the application process. (spring 2022)
- Informed by Tribal and underserved stakeholder input, enhance outreach to prospective eligible applicants to attract proposals from target rural communities. (ongoing)

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: Pending a decision on the status of Tribal lands held in trust, there may be an opportunity to develop a separate LSR call for Tribal proposals with set-side funding. To honor the government-to-government relationship between Tribes and the Forest Service, the Tribal LSR program must stand separate from the traditional LSR program that is executed under the umbrella of State forestry agencies. This will also ensure that Tribal proposals are evaluated within a similar pool and provide for provision of technical assistance if needed. Tribes, non-Federal partners, and the

Forest Service will all benefit from having the ability to perform landscape scale activities on all lands, including Tribal lands. Expansion of eligibilities to Tribal nations may require consultation and technical assistance on programs and application processes.

Current and future equity actions in State and Private Forestry and/or the Cooperative Forestry portfolio create opportunities to leverage the OTR actions to position the agency and Tribes for success in expanded costewardship and shared stewardship on a landscape-scale and across jurisdictions.

Data to Track Progress:

LSR accomplishments and performance measures are tracked in the Landscape Scale Restoration module (LaSR module). The LaSR module captures spatial data defining the boundary of the project where activities are implemented, and the area is being changed to some desired condition.

- Establish a baseline understanding of LSR through an equity lens:
 - Conduct a baseline analysis of projects funded in prior years to obtain an understanding of poverty and race demographics of the project portfolio (FY 2019–22).
 - Conduct geospatial analysis of eligibility and priority areas as determined by State forest action plans to gain an understanding of the intersection between poverty, race, and designated priority areas. Consider whether additional data intersections add value, such as climate or fire shed analysis.
- Integrate poverty and race demographic data into the scoring matrix and supporting information provided to grant panel reviewers for FY 2023.
- Analyze projects funded in FY 2023 through an equity lens, using same data tools as noted above. Compare the proportion of projects in underserved communities funded from FY 2019 to 2022 with the proportion of projects in underserved communities funded in FY 2023.
- Integrate poverty and race demographic data into the scoring matrix and supporting information provided to grant panel reviewers for FY 2023.
- Enhance LaSR module to include a metric and quantitative accomplishment that captures equity considerations so that data can be aggregated in the long term across projects in LSR and ensure that a description of how the project benefits communities is entered in the narrative accomplishment field, which is updated annually.
- Work with the chief data officer and the CIO to capture LSR accomplishments and performance measures that are tied to demographics, to enable gap analysis of LSR and introduce targeted actions to mitigate issues regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for underserved communities.

Staffing Plan: Increased outreach and partnerships require additional technical assistance and partnership support to be successful.

- The estimated funding level for LSR in FY 2022 is \$20 million.

- Current subject matter expert staffing for LSR supports the workload of 1.5 FTEs (0.5 FTE each in the WO, Region 9, and Region 8). The future subject matter expert staffing needs will need to support the workload of 7.5 FTEs (one in the WO; one in Region 9; one in Region 8; 0.5 each in Regions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10; and one coordinator shared across the western regions).
- Collateral support from the Office of the CIO, grants and agreements staff, and Tribal relations staff is needed to support performance reporting and data management, grants management, and Tribal outreach and relationship management.

Accountability:

- Garner support from and codevelop strategies with State forestry agencies, who collaborate in development of regional project review criteria and selection of funded projects.
- Host stakeholder input session for feedback on accessibility of LSR for non-Tribal applicants, including any barriers, and measure effectiveness of changes. Use Departmental Regulation (DR) 4330-005 related to limited English proficiency.
- Host stakeholder input session in coordination with OTR for feedback on accessibility of LSR for Tribal applicants, including any barriers, and measure effectiveness of change. Use DR 4330-005 related to limited English proficiency.
- Issue an annual report containing an equity data analysis of LSR investments. The first annual report will establish baseline trends.

9. Expand Urban Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities

Lead: State and Private Forestry

Outcomes: Invest in underserved communities, reduce barriers to access, and build trust.

The Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program is the only Federal Government program dedicated to the stewardship of the Nation's urban forests, which are close to cities and communities where more than 84 percent of Americans live. UCF is a \$40 million Federal community assistance program. Under UCF, the agency primarily works with State forestry agencies to provide technical, financial, research, and educational support and services to local governments, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and Tribal nations. There are more than 140 million acres of community forest land across the United States. UCF supports maintenance, restoration, and improvement of urban forest health while creating jobs, enhancing community resilience, and preserving the unique sense of place in cities and towns of all sizes.

UCF connects the administration's priorities on climate change, environmental justice, and workforce development in EO 14008, EO 13985, and the American Jobs Plan, respectively. Trees and green infrastructure reduce air pollution and stormwater runoff, decrease energy consumption, mitigate the heat island effect, and improve human health in urban communities through fact-based and data-driven best practices.

Actions:

- Issue strategic guidance to State forestry agencies that highlights equity considerations and helps prioritize disadvantaged communities, as identified in a national program accomplishment data report, in developing requests for proposals.
- In the annual request for proposals for UCF's national \$1 million Challenge Grant, issue strategic guidance that highlights equity considerations and prioritizes work in disadvantaged communities.
- Enhance outreach to prospective applicants to attract proposals from Tribes and high-need urban communities, and increase agency contributions, to the extent consistent with applicable law, where matching requirements are barriers.
- UCF is a covered program under the agency's Justice40 Initiative. Plan, budget, and execute UCF to advance goal of the Justice40 Initiative to deliver 40 percent of the benefits of agency investments to disadvantaged communities.
- Promote agency mission delivery through established partnerships with local community organizations. Increase access, provide education, and promote use of vulnerability- and equity-based data tools.

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: Forest Service actions and activities primarily focus on Tribal nations, our trust responsibility and treaty rights, and work conducted on the National Forest System and/or Tribal trust lands. However, there are valuable opportunities to expand engagement with Tribal nations, both on Tribal trust lands and

with Tribal members and organizations in urban areas, where the majority of Tribal members live (2010 Census).

Data to Track Progress:

- Track UCF accomplishments and performance measures in the Community Accomplishment Reporting System (CARS) module. Report performance at the scale of a U.S. Census block.
- Conduct baseline analysis of UCF projects funded in prior years to obtain an understanding of the poverty and race demographics of the population receiving benefits (timeline: 6–12 months).
- Integrate poverty and racial demographic data into the scoring matrix and supporting information provided to UCF grant panel reviewers (timeline: 6–12 months).
- Track UCF projects funded in future years to ensure increased representation of projects serving Tribes, minority-serving institutions, and disadvantaged communities (timeline: 2–3 years).
- Work with the chief data officer and the CIO to capture UCF accomplishments and performance measures that are tied to demographics, to enable a gap analysis of UCF and introduce targeted actions to mitigate issues regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility for underserved communities (timeline: 1–2 years).

Staffing Plan: Increased outreach and partnership require additional technical assistance and partnership support to be successful.

- UCF receives \$40 million annually in appropriations and has FTEs in national and regional offices. The national UCF program has seven FTE positions, four of which are vacant.
- Increase national subject matter expert staffing by three GS-13/14 FTEs to support and sustain equitable delivery of UCF.
- Increase regional subject matter expert staffing by three GS-12/13 FTEs to support and sustain equitable delivery of UCF.
- Collateral support from the Office of Communication, Office of the CIO, grants and agreements staff, and Tribal relations staff is needed to support communications, performance reporting and data management, grants management, and Tribal outreach and relationship management.

Accountability:

- Continue Tribal and stakeholder input sessions to obtain feedback on the accessibility of UCF, including any barriers in the application and implementation process.
 - UCF held a Justice40 Initiative UCF stakeholder engagement session in November 2021.
 - UCF collaborated with the “Taking Nature Black” conference to host the “Black Faith-Based Environmental Justice” roundtable in February 2022.

- In the fourth quarter of FY 2022, UCF will host a “Tribal Communities and Tribal Colleges” roundtable to discuss partnerships, opportunities and challenges with urban and community forest management, and careers.
- Issue an annual report containing an equity data analysis of UCF investments.
- Consult with the UCF Federal advisory committee on changes needed to meet equity goals and advance the “[Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan](#).”
- Consult with the National Association of State Foresters’ State urban forestry committee to ensure continued progress in meeting urban forestry goals in [State forest action plans](#).

10. Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Underserved Communities

Lead: National Forest System

Outcome: Reduce barriers to access.

- The Forest Service strives to ensure all people—regardless of race, color, national origin, or income—experience equal access to and equitable benefits from agency programs and services. However, it is well-documented across Federal land management agencies and in the conservation community that individuals and communities of color and other socially vulnerable populations face unique barriers and participate less in recreation and outdoor experiences on National Forest System lands. These underserved communities express the need for Federal land management agencies to address this inequity.
- Barriers to obtaining recreation special use permits (e.g., outfitting and guiding, campground concession, and recreation event permits) are one challenge that can limit valuable economic stimulus in communities of color and socially vulnerable communities. Based on recent workshops and data assessments conducted in support of EO 13985, the Forest Service does not always solicit applicants or advertise when recreation special use permits become available. As a result, existing permit holders are more likely to retain and obtain special use permits, and other groups and individuals may never know when new special use permits become available. When these groups and individuals become aware of permit availability, navigating the application process requires knowledge that socially vulnerable communities have difficulty accessing, putting them at a further disadvantage.

Actions:

- Promote social science research on how the agency might increase access to recreation special use permits and outdoor experiences within communities of color and socially vulnerable communities.
- Develop new survey methods to collect and track sufficient demographic data about recreation special use permit holders to accurately evaluate the distribution of recreation special use permits among demographic groups.
- Clarify policy as proposed in draft directives to broaden outreach for and notice of issuance of a prospectus for certain recreation special use permits (such as requiring competition for individuals or businesses to operate campgrounds) or open seasons for available outfitting and guiding permits.
- Analyze the full permitting process (from communication about permit availability to permit application requirements to permit issuance and reissuance) to identify junctures where underserved groups experience the greatest barriers to access, including literature review of existing resources to access. Incorporate provisions for Tribal cultural use in our permitting process and permits.
- Prioritize reducing and/or removing barriers to promote equitable access by consulting with Tribes and collaborating with current partners, such as the Next 100 Coalition,

Outdoor Afro, Latinos Outdoors, Coalition for Outdoor Access, Outdoor Recreation Roundtable, America Outdoors and the National Forest Recreation Association, as well as new national organizations.

- Prioritize resources for the development of an external facing online permitting application (e-Permitting) for commercial recreation special use permits.
- Conduct initial engagement with partners and trade associations:
 - Next 100 Coalition meeting on February 22, 2022
 - National Forest Recreation Association Conference March 8, 9 and 10, 2022
 - Confirm Tribal engagement needs and requirements
 - Program manager meetings with Coalition for Outdoor Access and America Outdoors
- Conduct Tribal consultation and engagement, as appropriate and required
- Continued engagement with partners and trade associations:
 - Begin implementing strategies identified during Q1
 - Host sensing sessions in collaboration partners and trade associations
 - In partnership with the Next 100 Coalition conduct a series of activities including focus groups, listening sessions and discussions with members, existing networks, and other affiliated organizations to gain understanding and identify opportunities to expand the community of practice with respect to DEIA practices and principles.
- Implement strategies and actions as identified in Q2-4

Benefits and Opportunities for Tribes and Alignment with OTR Action Plan: As a point of clarification, Tribes do not “recreate” on the National Forest System (NFS), but rather use the NFS for traditional cultural activities, subsistence, and ceremony, and often retain treaty rights to lands currently under Forest Service management. In contrast to some of the outreach communities above, Tribes have an intimate knowledge of national forests and grasslands and may find efforts to outreach “recreational activities” offensive. However, outreach to Tribes should focus on Tribal business and cultural enterprise opportunities and be explicitly inclusive of opportunities under the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act that both preserve Tribal culture and provide opportunity for cultural education for non-Tribal constituents.

This equity action aligns with the OTR action to position the agency and Tribes for success in expanded costewardship. As included in the opportunities discussed below, costewardship is key to successful implementation of the NATIVE Act, particularly in cultural tourism and recreation-related enterprise.

Accountability

Quarter 1:

- Identify demographic and permit data needed to effectively track the demographic composition of permit holders.
- Identify Tribal consultation and engagement needs for all actions.

- Implement eServices (e.g., eSignature, eForms, and ePermitting) that supports the Biden-Harris administration’s priorities by providing an avenue for the American public to obtain Forest Service documents through improved customer access.
- Reengage partners, organizations, and trade groups to explore opportunities to promote equity and reduce barriers in permitting.

Quarters 2–4

- Identify junctures where underserved groups experience the greatest barriers to accessing recreation special use permits.
- Improve processes by updating directives and policy and refining current competitive processes for permits. As appropriate, conduct Tribal consultation on these proposed changes.
- Develop a communication strategy targeting Tribes and rural communities that outlines the competitive permitting process of new and existing permit opportunities to underserved and economically vulnerable communities.
- Identify opportunities to reduce those barriers to increase access with U.S. Small Business Administration, USDA’s Rural Development’s Rural Business Service, and USDA’s Office of Assistant Secretary for Administration.
- Target communications about year 1–2: Develop an information collection request for submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Paperwork Reduction Act approval to collect demographic and other data regarding recreation special use permits.
- Work to reduce barriers to access by Tribes and underserved communities; modify the application and permitting process to support Tribal, underserved, and economically vulnerable communities. As appropriate, conduct Tribal consultation and engagement, and work with the chief data officer and the chief information officer (CIO) to upgrade existing recreation special use permit digital platforms to capture relevant data regarding the demographics, diversity, and equity of distribution of recreation special use permits.

Years 2–4

- Implement the collection of demographic and other data from permit holders.
- Monitor the degree to which reduction of barriers to access and targeted communications have increased the number of permit holders from underserved and economically vulnerable communities.

Data to Track Progress:

- Near-Term (6–12 months): Identify demographic and permit use data needed to effectively track demographic composition of permit holders; Conduct analysis to identify junctures where underserved groups experience the greatest barriers to accessing recreation permits; Reduce barriers to increase the number of outfitter and guide permits.
- Midterm (2–4 years): Develop an Information Collection Request for submission to the Office of Management and Budget for Paperwork Reduction Act approval to collect demographic and use data regarding recreation permits; Address and reduce identified barriers to underserved communities; Target communications about new and existing

permit opportunities to underserved and Environmental Justice communities; Design an approach for process navigators to support underserved communities during application processes.

- Maturity Model—Long-Term Potential Actions: Implement the collection of demographics and use data from permit holders; monitor the degree to which reductions of barriers to access and targeted communications have increased the number of permit holders from environmental justice and underserved communities.

Staffing Proposals: Immediately develop a not to exceed (NTE 1-year) Washington Office recreation special uses position to implement the equity action plan.

- Increase national recreation special uses staff capacity to focus specifically on issues of equity and Tribal consultation.
 - Complete a digital platform for online applications and e-permitting to streamline and increase the level of customer service provided to the public. This will require priority IT investment funding.
- Provide access to an outreach/communications specialist to develop tools and procedures to reach people of color, underserved communities, and rural communities when soliciting applicants for recreation special use permits.
- Increase special uses staff capacity at the regional and forest levels to assist prospective permit holders with the technical aspects of applications for recreation special use permits. For example, ensure there are at least two full time recreation special use permit administrators on every national forest.
- Increase national staff capacity to promote evaluation of permitting processes to reduce barriers to access and streamline the permit application process.
- Strive to hire within local communities and underserved populations to represent the demographics of the population and diversify the workforce. Work with Forest Service Human Resources and Office of Personnel Management to track this metric.

Appendix A: Measuring Outcomes

This equity action plan illustrates the wide range of Forest Service inputs (resources and investments) to increase equity in program participation, service delivery, and opportunities for both our workforce and communities. As we move forward to implement these equity actions, we will next take steps to build accountability and fully articulate desired outcomes.

As an example, when the Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) developed the OTR action plan, outputs and outcomes were introduced to improve performance, and increase accountability and responsiveness to Tribes, the agency, and Congress in support of our trust responsibility as a Federal agency. Several of those outcomes may translate into other equity actions and be modified to achieve other goals for the delivery of Forest Service programs and services, a diverse workforce, and the public that we serve. What follows are simple samples to spur thinking in creating outcome measures for other equity actions.

Goal	Outputs	Outcomes
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriate business rules and infrastructure for data capture and management in service to Tribes and other underserved communities. ▪ Meaningful, appropriate, and complete reports. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reliable data informs Forest Service decision making to achieve equitable program and service delivery. ▪ The Forest Service can provide reliable reporting to Congress in support of appropriations. Informed adjustments to program and service delivery.
Workforce capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Internships diversified by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Training program enrollment increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Number of ‘graduates’ increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technical assistance and training increases capacity to achieve multiple benefits in accomplishing mission-critical work. ▪ Skills acquired provide economic benefits to individuals and communities.
Increase workforce capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased hires that build staff capacity. ▪ Service and program delivery is expanded by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Service delivery wait times are reduced by (x) percent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Customer satisfaction is increased by (x) percent. ▪ Program and service use by Tribes and other underserved communities is increased by (x) percent annually.

Goal	Outputs	Outcomes
Workforce continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Partnership or other agreements with diverse educational institutions increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Number of graduates employed by the Forest Service increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reliable pipeline of ‘next generation’ stewards to meet national land management needs. ▪ Increased professional opportunity for Tribes and underserved communities
Workforce diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff diversification increased by (x) percent, within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workforce more accurately reflects the public served. ▪ Agency decisions are improved by different worldviews and life experiences to meet the needs of communities co-located with and served by the Forest Service.
Trained staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of Forest Service staff who complete Tribal relations training increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Pretest and posttest evaluation of efficacy of training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forest Service staff have improved cultural competency to engage with Tribes. ▪ Substantive relationships are created between the Forest Service and Tribes.
Improved communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culturally appropriate tools and strategies to reach diverse audiences. ▪ Analysis of efficacy of communications tools. ▪ Number of inquiries into Forest Service programs, services, hiring increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Diversified pool of applicants for Forest Service positions. ▪ Diversified pool of applicants for Forest Service programs and services.
Increased Tribal partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Percentage of Forest Service agreements with Tribes increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Use of Tribal authorities increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Percentage of Forest Plans and other planning that incorporate Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forest Service better meets trust responsibility to Tribes. ▪ Benefits to natural resources achieved through costewardship and parity of ITEK and western science in decision making.

Goal	Outputs	Outcomes
Diversified grant and contract awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Culturally appropriate tools and strategies to reach diverse audiences. ▪ Percentage of Tribal and underserved applicants increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. ▪ Percentage of aggregate awards to Tribes and underserved enterprises increased by (x) percent within (x) time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Forest Service fulfills mandate of EO 13985. ▪ Equity in delivery of opportunities substantively increased in support of Tribal and underserved communities.

Appendix B: Forest Service Justice40 Implementation Plans for Covered Programs

Due to recent updates to Forest Service Justice40 Covered Programs, the most up-to-date information can be found on the [Forest Service Justice40 SharePoint site](#).