USDA Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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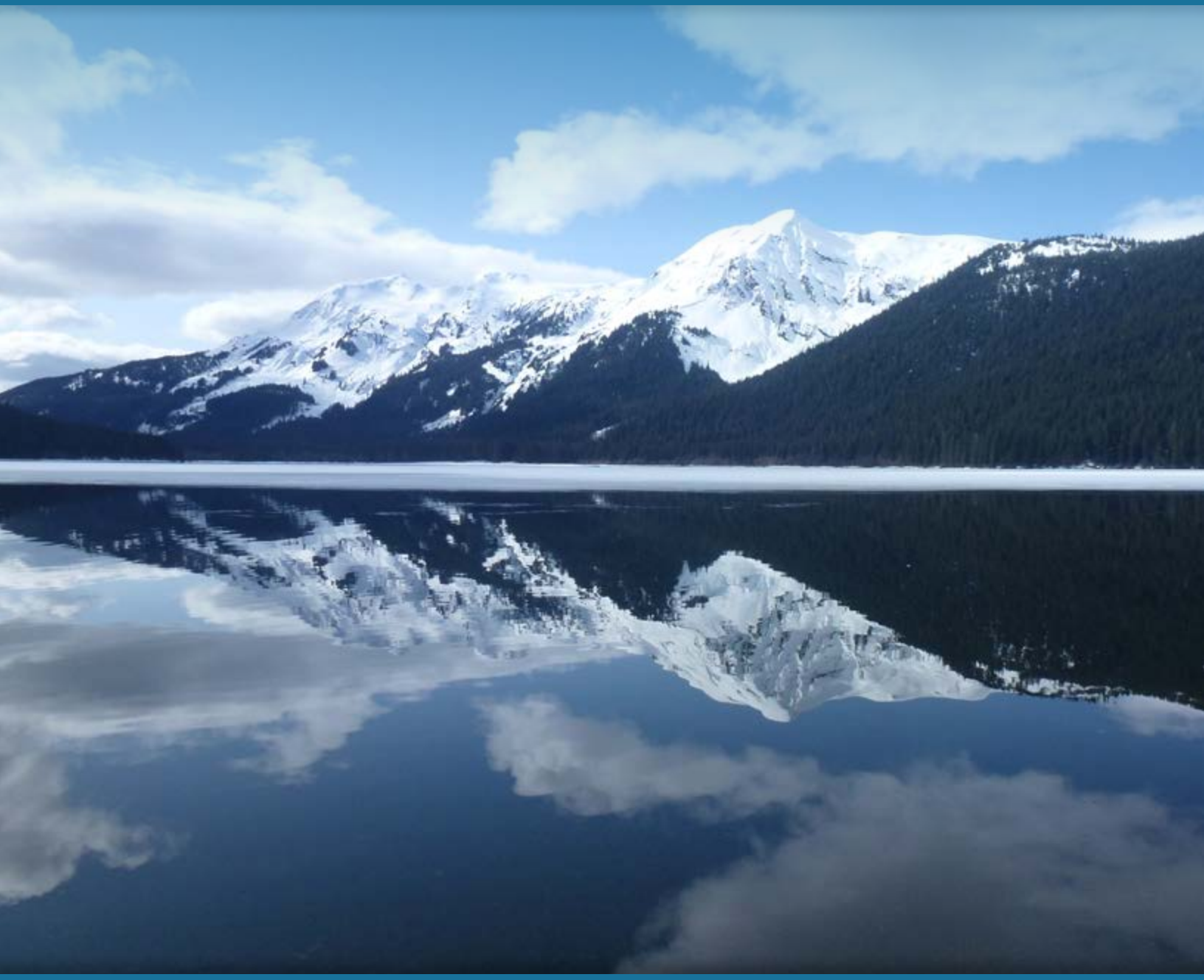


USDA FOREST SERVICE

CLIMATE ACTION TRACKER FISCAL YEAR 2023 SUMMARY

Over the last several years, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service has worked hard to accelerate agency progress toward addressing the climate crisis. The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) is the Forest Service's primary reporting and tracking tool on climate change actions, including those described in the Forest Service Climate Adaptation Plan, Executive Orders 14008 and 14057, and Secretarial Memorandum 1077-004. Fiscal year (FY) 2023 marked the second year of annual reporting for the CAT. The agency received responses from 159 offices, including all national forests and grasslands, research stations, and regional and national headquarters offices. Additionally, all nine National Forest System (NFS) regions developed regional climate action plans to outline steps they will take, or are already taking, to implement the Forest Service Climate Adaptation Plan and meet goals and strategic objectives in the CAT. Information from the CAT will be used to advise agency operations and investments in the approach to becoming a climate positive agency.

Progress in 2023 for the CAT is measured across four dimensions: Serving People, Organizational Capacity, Natural Resources Stewardship, and Operations and Infrastructure. Each dimension has a broader goal supported by several specific strategic objectives.

Climate Action Tracker dimensions and strategic objectives.

Cover photo: The sky and mountains are reflected in the water in Tongass National Forest, AK. USDA Forest Service photo by Don MacDougall.

Sunset view from Bickle Knob Observation Tower, Monongahela National Forest, WV. USDA Forest Service photo by Kelly Bridges.

Yavapai-Apache youth dancers at Archaeology Discovery Days at V Bar V Heritage Site, Coconino National Forest, AZ.
USDA Forest Service photo by Deborah Lee Soltesz.

Serving People

Goal: Work collaboratively with Tribal Nations, communities, and partners to make climate-informed and community-driven management decisions.

Tribal Engagment

Research stations and national and regional offices have provided resources to the field on best practices of incorporating Tribal perspectives into climate change work. In FY 2023, national forest and grassland offices primarily engaged with Tribes on climate change through National Historic Preservation Act consultation. Between 2022 and 2023, reported engagement with Tribal organizations increased through professional collaborations by 42 percent and incorporation of Tribal priorities into projects by 18 percent.

Envrionmental Justice

In 2023, 13 national program offices, regional offices, and research stations developed tools to support the field in incorporating environmental justice considerations (up from 4 in 2022). National forest and grassland offices engaged with disadvantaged communities in a variety of ways, including codeveloping projects by sharing knowledge to better identify and understand disadvantaged communities, conducting climate impact analysis and engagement sessions, and incorporating feedback.

Outreach

National program offices, regional offices, and research stations provided more than 1,000 hours of training on climate change and sustainability last fiscal year. Thousands of participants from both inside and outside of the agency attended these trainings, which covered topics such as climate impacts and adaptation, carbon analysis, and energy conservation.

Partnerships

Partnerships have been a key component of climate work across the agency. Major internal partners in 2023 included the Office of Sustainability and Climate, USDA Climate Hubs, the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science, and the Western Wildland Environmental Threat Assessment Center. Key external partners and collaborators included other Federal partners, universities, Tribal entities, States, and nongovernmental organizations.

Organizational Capacity

Goal: Ensure the Forest Service workforce has the knowledge, financial capacity, and empowerment to engage in climate preparedness and response for communities and landscapes.

Workforce

In 2023, between 350 and 400 full-time Forest Service employees allocated 20 percent or more of their time to climate change and/or sustainable operations (an increase from fewer than 300 employees in 2022). The number of interns, contractors, and other "hosted individuals" who supported climate change and sustainability work doubled from 2022 to 2023.

Financial Investment

The number of programs that reported incorporating climate change, carbon, and Tribal engagement into guidance and selection criteria in competitive funding programs roughly doubled between 2022 and 2023. The number of programs reporting incorporation of environmental justice and climate change increased slightly from 24 to 29.

Employee Training

In FY 2023, 90 percent of agency climate change coordinators reported receiving climate change training in the past year (up from 80 percent in 2022), with the majority receiving more than 5 hours of training. Twenty-five percent received over 20 hours of training (up from 16 percent in 2022).

Forest Service staff review maps at the Angeles National Forest, CA. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.

Blackmore Creek bridge installation in the Northern Region. USDA Forest Service photo.

Operations and Infrastructure

Goal: Reduce greenhouse gas emissions and ensure agency operations and infrastructure support climate responses and can adapt to the effects of climate change.

Sustainable Operations

Agency greenhouse gas emissions from operations and infrastructure (e.g., buildings, fleet, and fire operations) increased by an estimated 4 percent between 2022 and 2023. Agency fleet vehicles made up about 32 percent of reported emissions in 2023. In FY 2023, the agency continued to reduce landfilled material from wildland fire camps. The National Greening Fire Team ordered recycling services on 37 percent of incidents (up from 25 percent in 2022); over the past 3 years, 2 million pounds of material have been diverted from community landfills.

Climate-Ready Infrastructure

The Forest Service uses the National Asset Management Program (NAMP) to manage information associated with nationally competed project proposals for all physical infrastructure assets through the Great American Outdoors Act and other infrastructure funding programs. Out of 128 NAMP projects in FY 2023, 70 projects (55 percent) involved climate change vulnerability assessments in their project design (up from 30 percent in 2022).

Natural Resource Stewardship

Goal: Help ensure climate-informed resource management actions are effective at sustaining forests and grasslands as well as the benefits they provide for present and future generations.

Wildfire Risk Reduction and Adaptation

NFS regions and units have worked to incorporate climate change considerations into Wildfire Crisis Strategy Landscapes. As of 2023, 32 national forests and grasslands are home to at least one Wildfire Crisis Strategy landscape, and 27 were involved with activities that support integration of climate change, such as incorporating vulnerability and adaptation information into planning and collaborations with climate experts.

Natural Resources Adaptation

In FY 2023, approximately 6 percent of all signed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) decisions on national forests and grasslands incorporated vulnerability information, which decreased from 7 percent in FY 2022. In 2023, 26 percent of environmental assessments (EAs) and 57 percent of environmental impact statements (EISs) included vulnerability assessments. Units also reported that approximately 6 percent of all decisions (18 percent of EAs and 50 percent of EISs) signed in FY 2023 incorporated climate change adaptation strategies, up from 4 percent in FY 2022.

Carbon Stewardship

The Forest Service developed a consistent approach to carbon analysis in the form of template-based white papers. These white papers assist national forest and grassland offices with carbon analysis as recommended in the 2023 Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) National Environmental Policy Act Guidance on Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Climate Change. White papers have been completed on two-thirds of national forests and grasslands as of 2023. Findings from this work have been implemented in NEPA or planning projects on 112 national forests and grasslands.

Carbon and Climate Research

Forest Service Research and Development (R&D) reported 514 climate-related publications in 2023. About half of those publications focus on climate impacts to forests and other natural resources. In FY 2023, R&D reported an impressive 381 science delivery products to aid in interpreting and applying climate and carbon research to management, which marked a substantial increase from 198 in FY 2022.

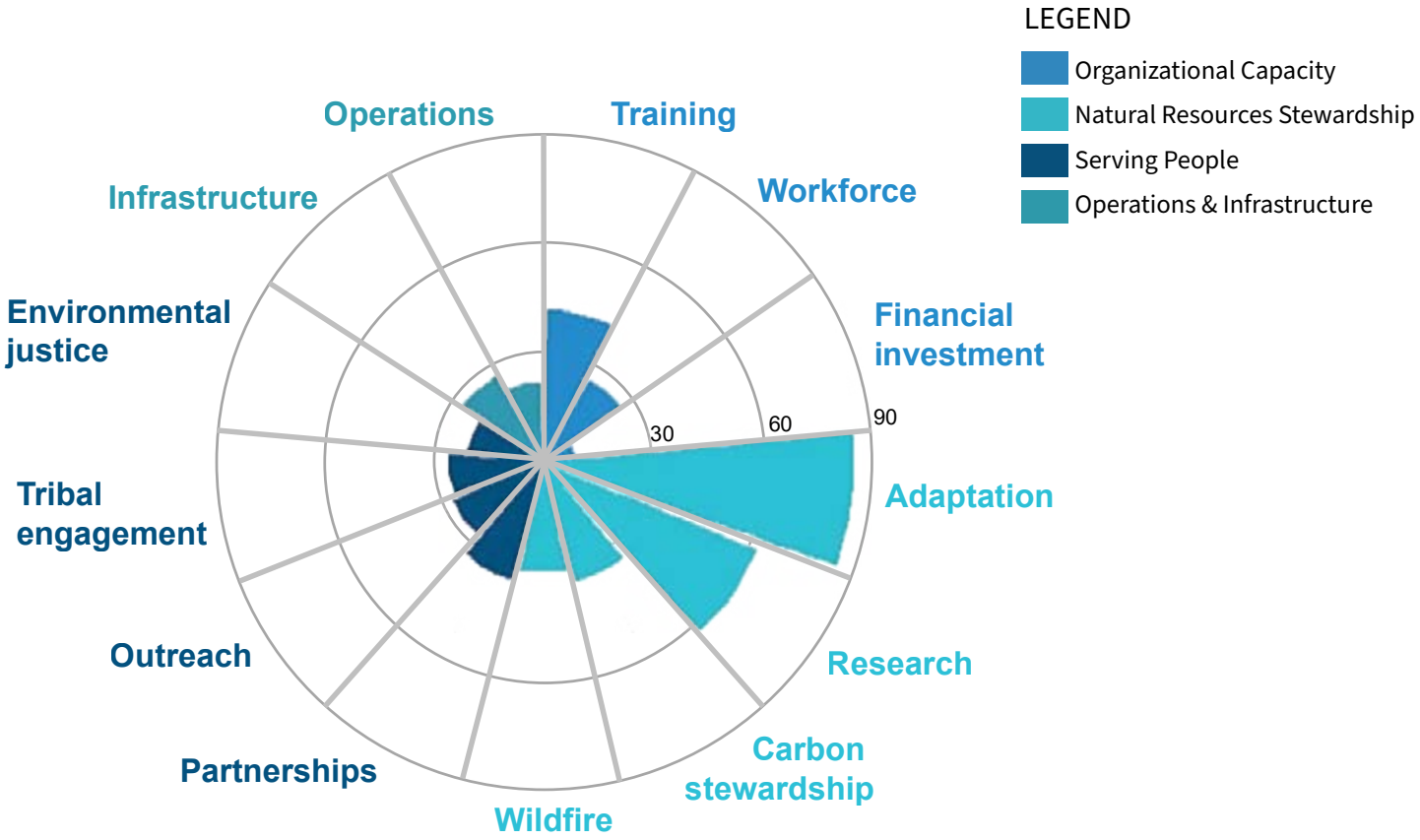
Members of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest work fires on the Mt. Hood National Forest, OR. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.

Regional Climate Action Plans

Each Forest Service region crafted a regional climate action plan (RCAP) that contributes to progress and on-the-ground implementation of the Forest Service Climate Adaptation Plan. In addition, the RCAPs support efforts to measure progress using the CAT and outline individual actions that each region is taking or will take to address risks from climate change. Together, the RCAPs describe 370 actions that also align with CAT strategic objectives. Although all strategic objectives are represented in the RCAPs, plan actions focus heavily on natural resource adaptation, climate and carbon research, and employee training.

Concluding Thoughts

Results from this report mark key steps toward the agency's transition to a more sustainable, climate-positive future. The Forest Service designed the CAT with room to evolve as the agency continues to develop its climate-related knowledge, experience, and data-reporting mechanisms. Information from FY 2023 is already being incorporated into new and improved capabilities as well as more targeted questions for the next iteration of the CAT. In addition, the Forest Service continues to build and maintain strong relationships with Tribes and partners to integrate climate change and sustainability into agency actions. As demonstrated in the CAT, the agency places importance on climate-focused employee education and work assignments, as well as the development of mechanisms to incorporate climate considerations into funding programs. Through sustainable operations and greening fire programs, the agency is working to reduce its environmental footprint. By integrating climate and carbon science into planning and on-the-ground actions, the Forest Service serves as a responsible steward of the landscape. Through these combined efforts, the Forest Service is finding new and innovative ways to contribute to climate solutions while fostering climate resilience in the Nation's forests and grasslands.



The number of actions in all regional climate action plans organized by each strategic objective in the Climate Action Tracker.

Creek into Shakes Lake Stikine Wilderness, Tongass National Forest, AK. USDA Forest Service photo by Karen Dillman.