



# Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project Biannual Report July - December 2015



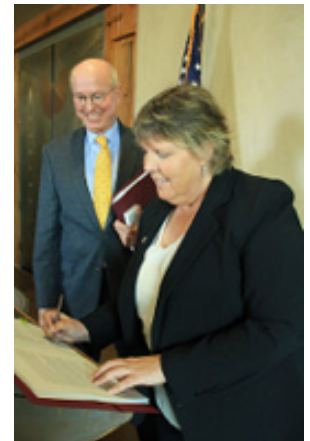
## **BACKGROUND**

In the November 2012 election, City voters overwhelmingly approved (74%) a \$10-million-dollar bond to fund the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP). This forest treatment effort, involving city, state, and federal lands, is designed to reduce the risk of severe wildfire and subsequent post-fire flooding in the Rio de Flag (Dry Lake Hills) and Upper Lake Mary (Mormon Mountain) watersheds. This report highlights significant accomplishments from July - December 2015.

## **PROJECT PLANNING – SIGNED FINAL RECORD OF DECISION**

On October 22nd, the FWPP reached another significant milestone when Coconino National Forest Supervisor, Laura Jo West, signed the final Record of Decision for the project's Environmental Impact Statement. A signing ceremony was held for partners and collaborators to celebrate this achievement. "This is a monumental occasion of which the entire community should be proud," said Laura Jo West. "We're at this point today because of the incredible collaboration among all the partners and the tremendous support we've received from the community. We got here together, and we're excited to continue working together in the next chapter of this exceptional project."

Since 2013, implementation of fuels reduction treatments started and is continuing on city and state lands, as well as National Forest lands, which had been approved through previous National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analyses. This final Record of Decision approves treatments on the remainder of the National Forest lands within the FWPP boundary — the majority of the project area.



*CNF Supervisor, Laura Jo West, signs the FROD while Flagstaff's mayor, Jerry Nabours, looks on.*

## **IMPLEMENTATION**

In the summer/fall 2015, 475 acres of Section 18, part of Observatory Mesa Natural Area, owned by the City of Flagstaff and within the FWPP boundary, were mechanically harvested. To plan for forest treatments on the Mesa, a Forest Stewardship Plan was collaboratively developed by AZ State Forestry and the City. The forest treatments were designed with restoration principles to resemble historic conditions, which reduces



*Feller buncher harvesting trees  
on Observatory Mesa*

the risk of severe crown wildfires, while promoting a fire adapted ecosystem where low intensity surface fires can now safely clear the forest of excessive fuels. Meanwhile, on the National Forest, layout of treatment prescriptions is mostly complete at the base of Mt Elden and approximately 400 out of 700 acres has been marked — this area will be mechanically thinned — the contract's award is expected this spring. On state land, the Department of Corrections Wildland fire crew thinned 130 acres of Section 30 near the Lake Elaine area in east Flagstaff.

## **OUTREACH**

The FWPP team hosted several events for the annual Festival of Science, which included Science in the Park, a brown bag lunch presentation and a hike into the Observatory Mesa project area, where participants of all ages experienced hands-on marking of trees in an area harvested just days later. FWPP hosted Northern Arizona University's Ecological Restoration class on a site visit also to Observatory Mesa so students could learn first-hand about the effort and witness harvesting operations. Harvesting methods fact sheets, designed to assist the public in better understanding the methods that will be used on FWPP, have been completed and are posted on the website. FWPP participated



*A young boy assists with the Festival of Science tree marking exercise*

in Salt River Project's "Healthy Forest, Vibrant Economy Conference" by setting up a display and engaging with attendees.



*NAU's Ecological Restoration class on Observatory Mesa*

## **MONITORING**

A City Monitoring Plan has been finalized and is posted on the FWPP website. The plan contains four capacity monitoring frameworks: 1) Fire Behavior, 2) Hydrologic Response, 3) Socioeconomic, and 4) Other Ongoing/Potential Monitoring Projects. The City is planning to review progress and update the Plan in 2016. The Ecological Restoration Institute published a white paper, "Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project: Creating Solutions through Community Partnerships" — a case study for others considering a similar initiative. This case study spans the first two years of the project and intends to convey the administrative functions and mechanisms used by the City of Flagstaff and the Forest Service to develop and implement FWPP. Lastly, FWPP is supporting hydrologic monitoring that is being conducted by the City Utilities Department near Mormon Mountain on Lake Mary.

## **LEARNING EXCHANGE WITH ASHLAND FOREST RESILIENCY PROGRAM**

FWPP team members met with staff from Ashland Forest Resiliency Stewardship Project in Ashland, Oregon. They spent the day together visiting Ashland's fire station, Ashland's Firewise Communities, and toured their watershed. From a community wildfire resilience perspective, the similarities between the two cities are striking. Discussions focused on how the two cities are tackling similar problems with similar approaches such as the complexities of helicopter logging, Ashland's successful Firewise Communities program (since 2011, 23 neighborhoods have received Firewise Communities USA designation), and critical outreach strategies. This was an invaluable experience that will continue with Ashland's future visit to Flagstaff. This exchange was sponsored by the Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network.

## **FINANCIAL INVESTMENT AND LEVERAGED FUNDS**

To date, through either cash contributions or in-kind services, various partners have provided over \$2.5 million to FWPP; this is in addition to the City's \$10 million commitment. The bulk of this additional investment has come from the Forest Service, but 13 other partners have also contributed to the project, demonstrating the widespread support the project has received.

## **SUMMARY**

We continue to make steady progress in our quest to reduce the threat of severe fire, protect two critical watersheds, and enhance community well being. We are excited to begin full-scale implementation on the National Forest in 2016. We thank you for your support and we are devoted to the success of this innovative project to maintain the quality of life of our community.