



Economics of the Ashland Forest Resiliency Project

Investing in Water, Wildlife and Quality of Life



Photo: Darren Campbell

The Ashland Forest Resiliency (AFR) partners work to prevent large-scale severe fire in the City of Ashland's forested watershed.

AFR protects high-value natural resources and community assets. By reducing fuels, increasing forest resilience, and returning beneficial fire, the project limits the potential for destructive wildfires that can cause unnecessary loss of habitat and homes, or lead to erosion and landslides that could severely impact the City's water supply.



AFR Project public tour. Photo: Darren Burgias

The True Costs of Severe Fire

Fire suppression costs run up in emergency response. Nearly \$2 billion annually are spent on suppression by the Forest Service alone. Yet this is a fraction of the true cost, which includes loss of homes, property and infrastructure, and the immediate short-term land rehabilitation work following a fire. "Impact" costs of lost business and tax revenue, and diminished property value compound the loss. Actual short-term **costs to communities in a large severe fire may approach 30x the cost of fire suppression.** Finally, longer-term costs



2009 Siskiyou Fire in Ashland Oregon

scotthardingphoto.com

accrue with lost human life, diminished fire fighter and resident health, and diminished ecosystem health and services.¹ Ashland depends on its scenic forest backdrop and recreation assets to sustain its thriving tourism-based economy, quality of life, and property values. City and business leaders, and community members agree, and they've put skin in the game—\$175,000 annually to complete and maintain their work.

An Ounce of Prevention

Investing now to reduce the potential for severe fire to damage the municipal watershed and community reduces long term costs. A study by the Center for Sustainable Economy² shows that the initial AFR investments could **save the federal government and the City \$20 million** by avoiding expensive reservoir dredging, temporary water supply, and reducing fire suppression costs and losses in recreation activity. These savings do not count property and life losses, or impacts of fire, smoke, and visual impacts on the tourism economy of Ashland.



Photo: Oregon Department of Forestry

¹ Western Forestry Leadership Coalition. 2010. The True Cost of Wildfire in the Western U.S. See www.wflcweb.org

² Talberth, J. and B. Bird. 2014. Reducing Fire Risk and Sediment Yield in the Ashland Municipal Watershed; A Preliminary Feasibility-level Analysis of Green Infrastructure Options. Center for Sustainable Economy.

Treatment Costs

Cutting and removing small trees and brush and burning debris piles – “Fuels Reduction” – is hard and expensive work, generally costing about \$1150/acre on AFR. When trees cut for restoration are of commercial size and abundant enough, they can be trucked and sold to mills to recover some of the treatment costs. The potential for thinning to “pay for itself” in Ashland’s watershed is diminished by the expense of helicopter removal, considered essential to minimizing impacts to watershed soils. Yet, nearly 2000 log truck loads have been sent to local mills, and **over \$5 million have been recovered in log sales**. On favorable, flatter terrain outside of the watershed, on less sensitive soils, thinning for restoration can pay for itself, or even provide a return to cover other project costs.



Restoration thinning. Photo: Josh Budziak, LRP

Aligning Objectives and Co-investment

AFR partners have been able to capture \$10.6 million in Forest Service funding over six years, including the initial \$6.5 million in economic recovery in 2010. Over the last year the partners have also secured \$4.5 million in funding from the Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to expand the work across boundaries to critical private lands. Meanwhile the City and non-governmental organization partners have invested over \$2 million in matching funds to the project.



Helicopter yarding in the Ashland Watershed. Photo: COA

Securing Forest Health, Jobs, and Education

To date, the AFR partnership sustains roughly 17 full-time jobs per year, and with indirect and induced work from the field and milling, sustains over 100 living wage jobs. Partner investment in ongoing workforce training improves local knowledge and skills and end results for the forest and community. The work provides unique opportunities for the public and school children to learn and lend a hand in stewardship, building a new stewardship ethic that bridges the divide between nature preservation and focused resource utilization.



AFR Partners (photo: TNC), Lomakatsi workforce, and school children in forest classroom in Ashland watershed (photos: LRP). Inset: AFR log brand (photo COA).