

Wood For Life (WFL)

Linking wood from forest restoration to Indigenous communities

The Situation

In 2020, the Wood for Life partnership, which is a collaborative network of organizations in northern Arizona and neighboring states, was formed to provide resources and a sustainable source of firewood to local tribal communities through forest restoration efforts; to reduce forest-wide fuels; and to foster and strengthen partner relationships.



Managers are seeking an outlet for the small diameter wood from forest restoration projects focused on reducing fuel loads to **decrease risk of catastrophic wildfires**.

The **closure of the Black Mesa coal mine and Navajo Generating Station** in 2019 created **energy uncertainty** for many tribal members on the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe.



Households within the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe **rely on burning firewood** in their homes as an economical heating option due to the expense of other sources.



Wood For Life uses three methods to supply communities with wood:

- **Firewood Tags**
- **Stewardship Agreements**
- **Free Use**

This wood is delivered or made available for pickup.

Needs Assessment

The Forest Service requested that the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) complete a needs assessment.



GOALS:

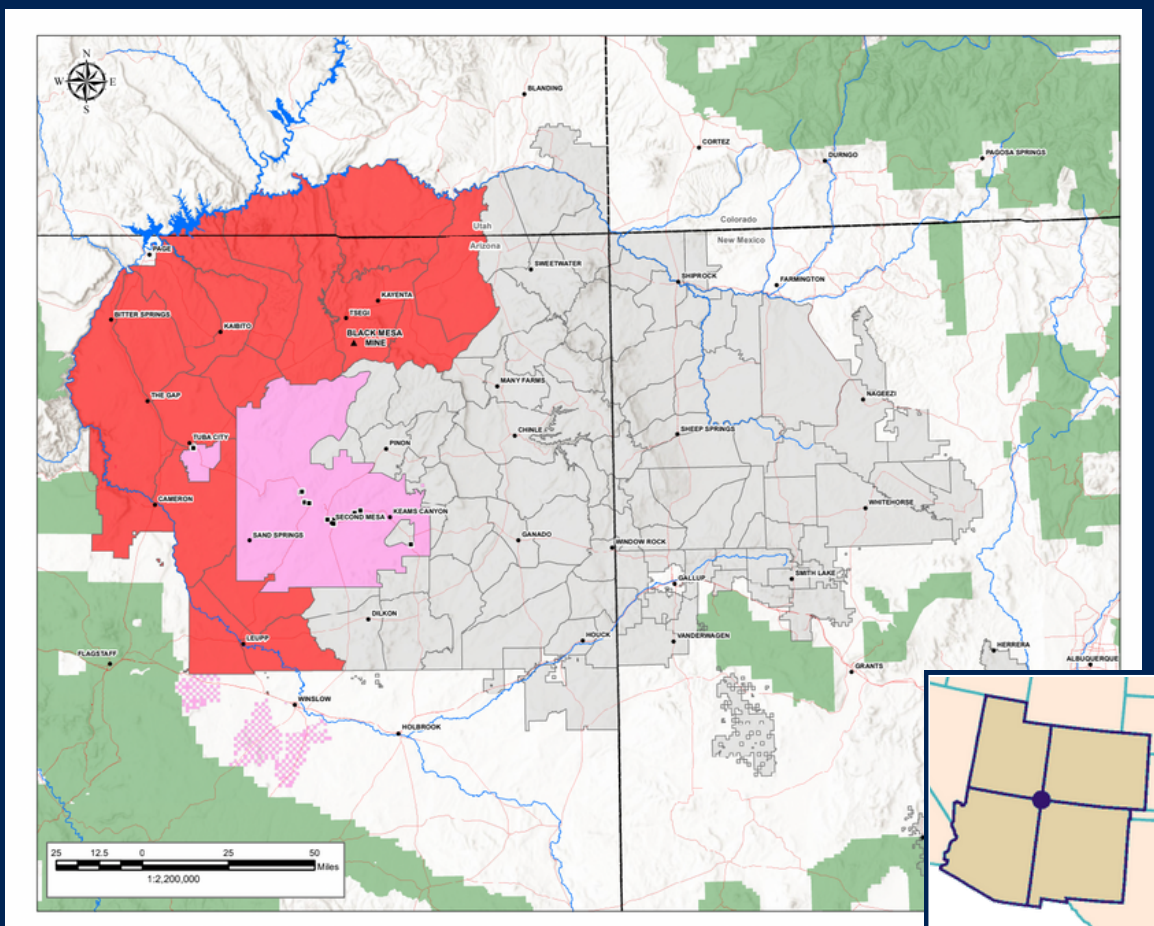
To better understand the **scale and distribution** of firewood need and **local capacities** for firewood distribution among tribal partners.

The ERI team traveled to meet with **local tribal leaders** (e.g., nonprofits, managers and elected officials for chapters in the Western Navajo Agency, and Community Service Administrators for the villages of the Hopi Tribe) to **introduce them to WFL** if needed and **interview them** to understand their needs and capacity.



Findings

- An estimated **90% of households** in the Hopi Tribe and Western Navajo Agency rely primarily on firewood for heating.
- The average household uses an estimated **9 pickups (4.5 cords) of firewood every winter**.
 - This is approximately **\$2,475** in heating costs per winter.
- Nonprofits, Navajo chapters, and Hopi villages already function as wood banks, particularly **serving elderly, disabled, veteran, and single parent households**.
- **Labor** for last-leg processing of firewood to stove-ready sizes **is a limiting factor**.
- **Delivery** to households who cannot pick it up themselves **is a limiting factor**.



Map of the four corners region (CO, NM, AZ, UT) displaying the Western Navajo Agency (red), Hopi Tribe (pink), and National Forests (green) participating in the WFL partnership. (Other agencies of the Navajo Nation (grey))

Recommendations

- Increase tribal **awareness of WFL** and similar partnerships
 - **In-person outreach** strategies
 - Needs assessments in other areas
 - Improved **planning**
- Provide support for **transporting wood**
 - Need for increased **funding and staff**
 - Foster **collaboration** between tribal, agency and nonprofit partners
- Foster **connections between different National Forests** to minimize travel distances
- Increase **local tribal capacity** to process and distribute wood
 - Need for **funding and equipment**
 - Provide **resources** and **trainings**
- Initiate the **use of agreements** between local tribal entities and the Forest Service
 - **Stewardship contracts**
 - **638 agreements**
 - **Memorandums of Understanding**
- Support the **development of similar firewood partnership frameworks** across the US

✦ The beginnings of similar firewood partnership frameworks are being used in ✦
Colorado, California, Idaho, Utah, New Mexico, and Nevada.



MORE INFO

<https://eri.nau.edu/wood-for-life/>

<https://www.nationalforests.org/get-involved/wood-for-life>

