



Wood For Life

Providing firewood through forest restoration efforts to tribal and underserved communities

Wood For Life in northern Arizona is a collaborative network of organizations working to provide resources and a sustainable firewood source to Indigenous communities while restoring forests, reducing fuel loads, and building strong, lasting partnerships.

A Changing Landscape

In 2019, the Kayenta coal mine complex and Navajo Generating Station **closed**, bringing **energy uncertainty** to many members of the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe, as they **no longer had coal for heating** their homes. The closure of the mine and a movement away from coal use by households due to health concerns **increased the already existing need for firewood**.



ERI Director of Native American Forest and Rangeland Management Jon Martin learning about firewood processing by Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps on the Coconino National Forest. Photo by Niki vonHedemann, ERI.

A partnership is born...

In 2019, the Wood For Life partnership in northern Arizona formed in response to the closure of the coal mine complex combined with the lack of markets for small-diameter ponderosa pine generated by federal land restoration and fuel reduction projects. The partnership includes the Forest Service, numerous Navajo Nation chapters and Hopi Tribe villages, the National Forest Foundation, Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps, the Ecological Restoration Institute, and other organizations in northern Arizona. Firewood is made available to tribal partners for pickup or delivered to community wood banks.

Needs Assessment



The Forest Service requested that the Ecological Restoration Institute (ERI) complete a needs assessment to understand the scale of firewood demand and highlight funding needs to support the partnership.



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 discuss their firewood needs and wood bank capacity.

Key Findings

Discussions with tribal leaders and community representatives led to several key findings:

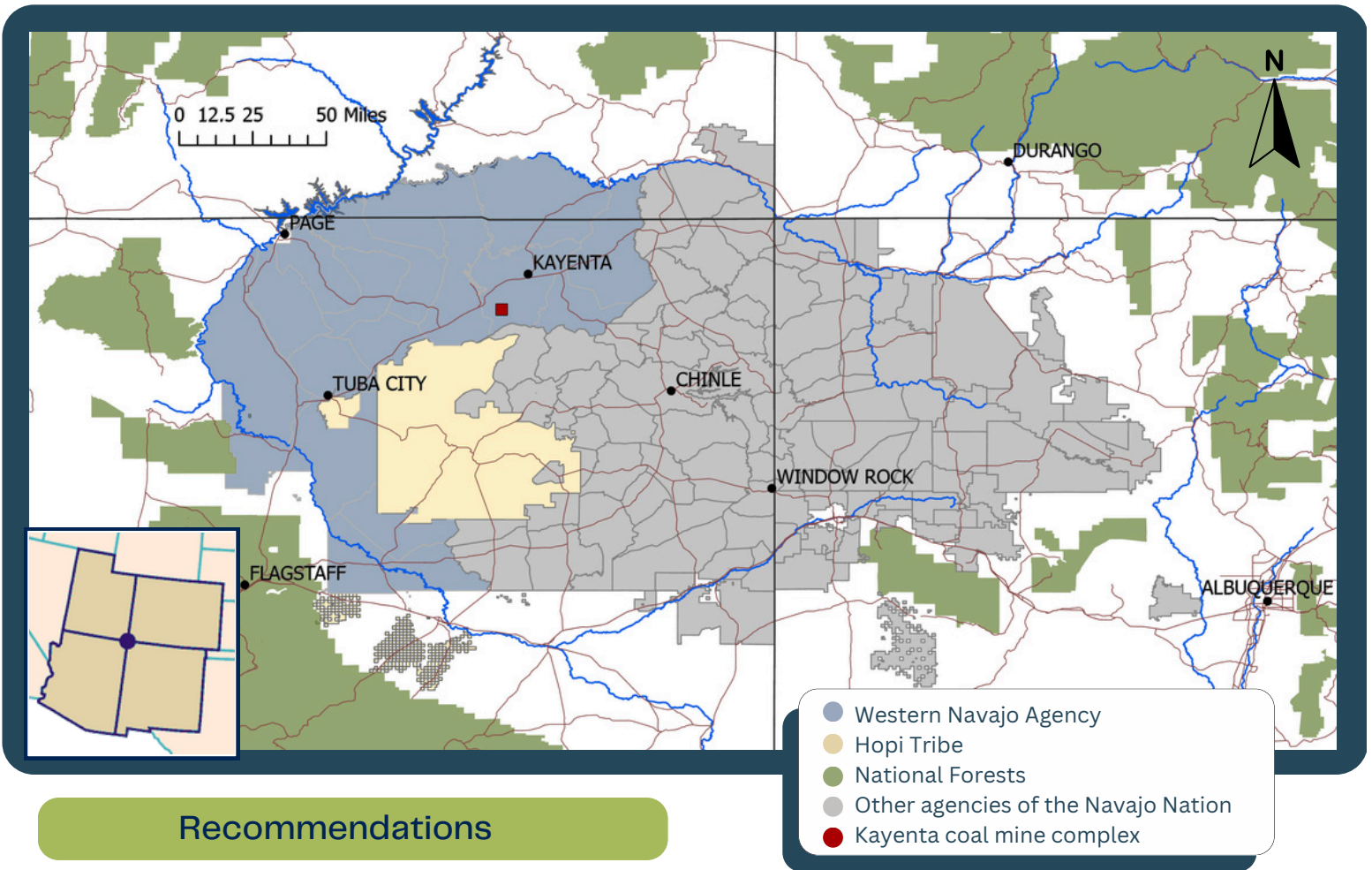
- Approximately **90% of households** in the Hopi Tribe and Western Navajo Agency rely on firewood for heating. Other heating sources are also used to supplement firewood, although firewood is the most common heating source.
- An average household burns an estimated **5-10 pickup loads of firewood** annually, equivalent to 2.5-5 cords.
- With a pickup load of wood averaging \$262, purchasing these 5-10 pickup loads would cost **\$1,310-2,620/year**.
- The Hopi Tribe and Western Navajo Agency (21% of the Navajo Nation population) collectively consume an estimated **25,000-50,000 cords of firewood** annually.
- Nonprofits, Navajo chapters, and Hopi villages **already function as wood banks**, particularly serving elderly, disabled, veteran, and single parent households.
- **Capacity challenges** include **labor** to process, distribute, and deliver firewood to households, sufficient delivery and storage **space**, and adequate heavy **equipment**. Households most in need often have difficulty picking up firewood from distribution points.

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Map of the Four Corners region (CO, NM, AZ, UT)



Recommendations

The following recommendations stem from the results of the needs assessment:

- Enhance **tribal awareness of and participation in WFL** and similar partnerships, through in-person outreach strategies to build stronger connections and foster collaboration.
 - Conduct needs assessments in other areas to help identify specific challenges and opportunities.
 - Create a WFL Playbook or FAQ list to facilitate creating and growing WFL partnerships in other regions.
- Provide more **support for transporting wood** through increasing funding and transportation staffing, fostering collaborations, and building connections with other national forests to minimize travel distances.
- Support the **reduction of firewood need** through increasing funding, training, and assistance to improve housing and to clean and maintain wood burning stoves safely.
- Increase **local tribal capacity** to process and distribute wood. There is a need for funding for equipment and especially for staffing wood banks.
 - Increase grant funding limit caps to enable the purchase of heavy equipment for wood processing.
 - Add WFL coordinator positions to support chapters, villages, and tribal firewood nonprofits.

- Initiate the **use of agreements**, such as stewardship contracts, Tribal Forest Protection Act/638 agreements, and MOUs between local tribal entities and the Forest Service.
 - Increase tribal decision-making capacity on their ancestral lands. Through WFL, tribal partners are helping the Forest Service meet their restoration goals by providing an outlet for forest byproducts.
- Support the **development of similar firewood partnership frameworks** across the U.S. through regional workshops and shared learning.



Chinle chapter wood bank on the Navajo Nation. Photo by Todd Middleton, courtesy of the National Forest Foundation.

Similar firewood partnerships are in place and expanding in other western states.



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

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

