



Background

Wood for Life (WFL) in northern Arizona is a collaborative network of organizations working to provide resources and a sustainable source of firewood to local Tribal and firewood-using communities through forest restoration efforts; to reduce forest-wide fuels; and to foster and strengthen partner relationships.

Purpose

The Ecological Restoration Institute completed a [WFL Needs Assessment in 2024](#), which identified an opportunity for a workshop series to grow and strengthen the partnership. The first in this series was held in December 2024, bringing together WFL partners across northern Arizona and beyond to discuss sustainable firewood utilization. The workshop aimed to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and develop actionable strategies for enhancing forest health and community resilience. The first Wood for Life Workshop brought together partners from forestry, conservation, tribal communities, and local governments to discuss sustainable wood utilization. The workshop aimed to foster collaboration, share knowledge, and develop actionable strategies for enhancing forest health and community resilience through wood-based initiatives.



Participants

Over 50 participants attended the workshop both online and in-person in Flagstaff, Arizona at the City of Flagstaff's Public Works Building. Attendees represented the local-level Native nation leadership (Navajo Nation chapters, Hopi Tribe Community Service Administrators, and White Mountain Apache Tribe), Tribal-led firewood nonprofits and wood banks, the Forest Service (Coconino, Kaibab, and other national forests), the [National Forest Foundation](#), [Ancestral Lands Conservation Corps](#), the Ecological Restoration Institute at Northern Arizona University, [Coalitions and Collaboratives \(COCO\)](#), and [Arizona Public Service](#). [Southwest Decisions Resources](#) facilitated the workshop over two days.

Goals

Over two days, participants in WFL came together for three goals in the first workshop:

- Share how WFL currently operates in Northern Arizona and other regions.
- Explore how WFL could improve success through grant opportunities and new agreements between the Forest Service and Tribal entities.
- Understand roles, identify strategic improvements, and enhance connections and participation in WFL.

Questions

Key questions were posed to the partners at the workshop:

- What are the elements of a successful partnership (i.e., ample wood supply, funding adequacy, etc.)?
- How do we make WFL inclusive for everyone (i.e., subsidies, sharing resources, distribution equality)?
- What does success look like (i.e., greater partnerships over time, formal agreements in place, acres treated, number of homes served)?

Themes that Emerged at the Workshop

Mutual Support

A central theme of the workshop was the importance of helping one another and working together, including:

- Building each other up.
- Sharing information because growth relies on networking and awareness of different resources.
- Strengthening relationships with others to build capacity.
- Writing letters of support for others' grant applications.

Trust and Respect

Participants mentioned trust and respect multiple times throughout the sessions. There is a need for:

- Fostering trust and respect among partners.
- Finding common ground with others.
- Following through on promises or agreements.
- Knowing your limits and capacity, and communicating that effectively.

Access to Information

Information becomes more accessible if there is a centralized method of sharing and collecting.

Suggestions included:

- Building a centralized database for grant writing and other needs.
- Ensuring that this information is accessible, such as having maps in different formats.
- Creating a central location to learn about WFL and how to successfully develop and manage a wood bank.

Inclusivity

Some of the session questions centered on inclusivity, which included:

- Being open to other communities and entities participating in WFL.
- Including smaller organizations, individuals, and communities and those who have not yet received wood.
- Not creating competition amongst communities.
- Using multiple avenues of outreach and increasing awareness of WFL and wood distribution.

Open Communication

Participants frequently mentioned a need for clear communication, including:

- Communicating consistently and openly to foster trust building.
- Understanding goals, desired outcomes, needs, and the ability to meet these needs.
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities.

Sharing Resources

Participants deemed resource sharing essential and recommended:

- Entering into agreements and partnerships with entities to find resources for each other.
- Having one entity to apply for funding for a set of partners.
- Distributing or sharing the costs of equipment and labor among communities.

Desired Outcomes

What does success look like?

Attendees separated into three breakout sessions to envision the future of the Wood for Life partnership, including what WFL success and desired outcomes look like. Understanding success metrics helps develop a direction, goal, and framework for achieving desired outcomes.

Goals & Objectives



Long Term Desired Outcomes

- Ensuring longevity and sustainability of the partnership and firewood distribution.
- Agencies recognizing WFL as a formal program and including it in their policies.
- WFL hiring personnel to maintain data and records, track needs, and understand local capacity.
- Increasing chapters and villages' capacity to maintain partnerships and collaborate with others.

Challenges & Solutions

Participants identified barriers, challenges, and potential solutions to integrating the WFL partnership into their communities, organizations, or governing bodies.

1. There is a lack of access to equipment and trucks to transport and process wood.

- Work with the [Community Navigator Initiative](#) (CNI) to connect Tribes to the right programs and people to accomplish what is needed.
- Apply for grants to purchase trucks or other equipment with CNI and other partner guidance.
- Access grant writing training and support such as grant writing classes at [Local First Arizona](#) or [Diné College](#).
- Explore non-federal funding, as there are fewer restrictions on the allocation of spending.

2. Frequent changes in leadership within both Tribal and Federal governments impact partnerships.

- Create documentation and plans for transitioning to new leadership.
- Provide information on how WFL works and partnership goals for new personnel and hires.

3. Long distances can be prohibitively costly for Tribal governments or members to pick up wood.

- Seek the fewest number of steps to move the wood from the National Forest to Tribal lands.
- Enter into agreements or contracts between Tribal entities and the Forest Service to fund restoration and wood transportation and distribution. These could be Master Stewardship Agreements, [Tribal Forest Protection Act](#) agreements, or [638 agreements](#).

4. There is concern about creating dependency or overreliance on Tribal governments and WFL for firewood.

- Continue to develop local policies for equitable and fair wood distribution.
- Create incentives to encourage firewood recipients to help one another. For example, recruit volunteers and have them work before receiving a load of wood, or have recipients deliver one load to a household in need before receiving their load.

5. There is a need for more paid labor and volunteers to help with wood distribution.

- Maintain distribution hubs to work together to serve more than one community.
- Increase outreach within communities to recruit volunteers.
- Create seasonal temporary positions for wood distribution support.
- Build educational programs for youth to facilitate engagement in their communities.

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National Forest Foundation
nationalforests.org/get-involved/wood-for-life/northern-arizona-wood-for-life-partnership

