



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.



In August 2025, partners gather for the second Wood For Life workshop in Flagstaff, Ariz. Photo credit Andi Rogers, Southwest Decision Resources

Purpose

The August 2025 Wood for Life Workshop brought together Tribal, non-profit, university, city, state, and federal partners to strengthen collaboration around forest restoration, reducing fire risks, and providing firewood to Indigenous and firewood-using communities. This workshop was the second in a series of three workshops, building upon workshop 1 held in December 2024. The planning committee consisted of representatives from the [Ecological Restoration Institute](#), [Southwest Decision Resources](#) (workshop facilitators), [Coalitions and Collaboratives \(COCO\)](#), the [National Forest Foundation \(NFF\)](#), Navajo Nation-based firewood nonprofit [Diné Báádeit'į](#), Hopi villages, and [Coconino National Forest](#).

Participants

Over 70 participants attended the workshop both online and in-person at the City of Flagstaff's Aquaplex for one and a half days. In addition to the planning committee, attendees represented Tribal governments ([Navajo Nation chapters](#), Hopi villages, and [the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes](#)), Tribal-led firewood nonprofits and LLCs ([Red Feather Development Group](#), [Native Outreach Projects](#)), other nonprofits ([National Wild Turkey Federation](#), [Alliance for Green Heat](#), [Blue Forest](#), [Change Labs](#)), the [USDA Forest Service](#) (Coconino and Kaibab National Forests), and the [City of Flagstaff](#), among others.

Goals

Over two days, participants in WFL came together with shared goals:

- Understand the geographic scope of the WFL effort.
- Become familiar with existing funding opportunities and the details of contracts and agreements.
- Understand the complexities and opportunities for organizational and business support for Tribal-led partner efforts.
- Share experiences, successes, and challenges in operating WFL through interactive small group discussions.
- Participate in relevant work sessions based on organizational and business needs.

WFLToday

- WFL has adapted and grown through administration changes, funding challenges, and shifts in resource capacity. WFL continues to meet current administrative directives by supporting increased timber production, forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction by creating an outlet for biomass removal.
- While this workshop focused on WFL in northern Arizona, WFL networks have grown in New Mexico, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, Montana, California, and Idaho.
- “Wood is not free” – there is a need to honor the labor, cost, and cultural value in moving firewood from the forest to stoves.

Attendees were asked what aspects of WFL are working well, what are challenges that they experience, and what are potential solutions to these challenges. Some common responses emerged:

What's working well	Transportation, community involvement, organization of wood distribution, and collaboration
Challenges	A lack of funding, insufficient transparency, inconsistent delivery schedule, a need for more training opportunities, small resource capacity, concerns about the elderly obtaining sufficient firewood, and improving distribution routes
Solutions	Utilizing lists of elders and communities most in need of firewood, soliciting funding to get heavy equipment, recruiting more volunteers, leveraging partnerships, scheduling deliveries, facilitating more workshops on grant opportunities and creating wood bank hubs, completing more firewood needs assessments in other regions, and coordinating with other wood bank hubs



Attendees hear from partners and participate in discussions at the August 2025 Wood For Life workshop in Flagstaff, Ariz. Photo credits Andi Rogers, Southwest Decision Resources and Niki vonHedemann, Ecological Restoration Institute



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Themes that emerged at the workshop:

1. WFL plays a key role in forest restoration and avoiding catastrophic fire.
 - Overstocked, fire-suppressed forests in northern Arizona require thinning and prescribed burning. WFL provides a vital outlet for small diameter wood from forest thinning operations. Removing this wood can:
 - Improve forest health, reduce fuel loads, and improve watersheds.
 - Reduce smoke impacts by repurposing biomass that otherwise would have been burned as piles in the forest.
 - Create economic and community benefits.
 - Provide an avenue to secure funding.
2. WFL partners already demonstrate proof of concept and should ensure that they can be found by funders.
 - There are a variety of funding and finance opportunities to support the growth of the WFL partnership. This includes private funding (philanthropic grants, individual donations, corporate sponsorships, or carbon credits) and public funding (pass-through grant programs, competitive grant programs, federal agreements, and federal contracts).
 - A working session at the workshop connected WFL partners to COCO who provide support for grant applications.
 - Less than 1% of philanthropic funding supports Indigenous-led efforts. There is a need for greater visibility, organization, and Indigenous leadership. Many funders are increasingly interested in funding Indigenous-led organizations.
 - WFL partners need to be fundable and findable. Being fundable means having your entity ready to receive funds. Being findable means making sure your story is accessible and easily understandable to funders. Because WFL is already operating successfully, partners have already demonstrated that this concept works. A working session at the workshop helped WFL partners set up LinkedIn pages to increase their findability.

3. The Forest Service's Shared Stewardship approach offers opportunities for Tribes and other partners to engage more in forest restoration and WFL.

- Shared Stewardship is a management approach where the Forest Services reaches out to partners – including Tribal governments and communities – to help increase capacity to meet land management goals.
- There are a variety of mechanisms available for working with the Forest Service.
 - Contracts: purchasing services that benefit the Forest Service. A session on contracting through the NFF illustrated how WFL partners can bid on contracts to complete restoration work.
 - Good Neighbor Authority: agreements that allow the Forest Service to partner with a Tribe, state, or county to accomplish authorized restoration services on National Forest lands.
 - Tribal Forest Protection Act: a partnership between the Forest Service and Tribes to accomplish work that is proposed by the Tribe.
 - 638 Contracts: the financial and contractual agreement for Tribal proposed work.

4. WFL-participating organizations are shaped by Indigenous values.

- A business panel included Duane Humeyestewa from Change Labs, Dr. Rosanna Jumbo-Fitch from the Navajo Nation Chinle Chapter, and Mary Descheeny Reyna from [Indigenous Workplace Solutions](#).
- These leaders shared several recommendations for WFL partners:
 - Involve youth and elderly in operations.
 - Maintain consistency, coordination, and communication.
 - Gather community data to help with grant applications and operations.
 - Develop an employee handbook with clear policies no matter the size of the organization; this can incorporate an Indigenous approach to human resources to reflect an organization's values
 - Establish long-term goals and seek mentorship to help achieve them.

Key Takeaways

- Collaboration remains foundation for WFL success
- Investment in Tribal capacity and leadership is integral for the continuation and growth of Wood For Life.

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