



Spring into Action



Spring is an incredibly busy time on the National Forests and Grasslands across the Northern Region. Forest Service staff along with contractors, partners, and volunteers are actively engaged in a wide variety of **restoration actions** and **preparation activities**. It takes an all lands, all-hands approach to **sustain our nation's forests and grasslands**. Our **Shared Stewardship Strategy** is at the heart of these efforts, integrating the capacity and skills of everyone to achieve shared goals.

April is host to **National Volunteer and Service Month, Arbor Day, and Earth Day**—all perfect calls to action for volunteers to get out and **support public and private lands**. These are great opportunities to invite our publics and partners to **Spring into Action** and share their energy and enthusiasm for forests and grasslands by volunteering and celebrating. Thank you for taking time to plant a tree, participate in a clean-up day, or other opportunities you have engaged in with your public forests and grasslands.



National Volunteer and Service Month

April is **USDA Forest Service National Volunteers and Service Month**. The Northern Region is heavily reliant on our corps of volunteers to accomplish countless projects, provide expertise and perspective, and bring helping hands together to answer the call of conservation. For more than **100 years**, the Forest Service has brought people and communities together to assist. Through campground hosting, trail maintenance, visitor services, research and more, volunteers make significant contributions to the legacy of conservation for future generations. Volunteers are essential in helping our agency deliver benefits to the American people.



In **2023**, the Northern Region had **≈240,000 volunteer hours / \$7.6 million** in resource work, improving forest and grassland health, increasing access, and aiding communities across Montana, Idaho, and North Dakota. **LEARN MORE** - [Volunteer Opportunities](#)

New Growth Collection/Seed Production



In some places, unnatural heavy fuel loads on the ground allow wildfires to burn much hotter than they would have historically. These extreme conditions cause natural resource damage and can result in a 'stand replacing fire' where most or all the trees are killed. With few living trees to supply seeds, human intervention is required for recovery. **Reforestation for ponderosa pine stands** starts with Forest Service **tree climbers collecting scion (new growth)** from ponderosa pine trees. This spring scion was collected on the **Ashland Ranger District** to support reforestation after stand replacing wildfires.



The **fresh shoots** were **grafted onto root stock** at a Forest Service nursery. The grafted trees will be planted in a seed orchard in Plains Montana and will **bear cones within 3 to 5 years**. Seed collected from the orchard pinecones will be grown out for planting projects on the east side of the Custer Gallatin NF.

Partnership Spotlight



The U.S. Forest Service and **The Nature Conservancy (TNC)** have a long-standing relationship to protect forests, reduce hazardous fuels, and conduct prescribed burns. Both recognize the importance of increasing the pace, scale and quality of fuels management and prescribed fire treatments to mitigate wildfire impacts and to enhance and maintain the resiliency of fire-adapted ecosystems.

With **six decades of experience in fire management**, TNC is unique among conservation organizations as a respected member of U.S. and international fire management communities, with experience safely conducting ecological burns on approximately **100,000 acres of its own lands** each year.

The **Northern and Intermountain Regions** have entered into a new partnership agreement - **Idaho Statewide Prescribed Fire and Fuels Management Support**.

This agreement provides for cooperation on training and development, planning, monitoring, and implementation of prescribed fire and/or mechanical fuel treatments. Both will benefit from the increased skills, strategies, capacity and practitioner networks to work more effectively through an equitable, all-lands, cross-organizational and cross-jurisdictional approach. Planned work in 2024 includes the **Kootenai WCS Landscape and North Idaho Shared Stewardship Priority Area**.

Spring Planting



Spring has sprung and **planting season** in the Region has begun! Forests and the Coeur d'Alene Nursery have been hard at work preparing for the start of planting season. Logistics are key for a successful planting program. There are many steps in to getting seedlings from cold storage at the Nursery to the Forest; prepping forest tree coolers to receive trees; thawing the trees; planting contract details to finalize; preparing Forest Service trucks to transport trees to the site; assessing readiness of the planting sites; scheduling FS inspectors for monitoring the tree planting crews; contract implementation; installing post-planting staked rows where needed; and reporting. The logistic list is long yet every year our skilled silviculturists and culturists in the region check their lists and implement successful planting programs. This year the Northern Region anticipates planting **around 2.7 million seedlings (bareroot and container) over 9,600 acres** between our spring and fall planting programs.



Increasing Capacity - Since March 2024 - Region 1 has hired positions including:

- 1 Rangeland Management Specialist
- 3 Archeologists
- 3 Biological Science Technician (Plants)
- 2 Budget Analysts
- 3 Rec. Management Specialists
- 1 Wildlife Biologist
- 1 Assistant Fire Management Officer
- 1 District Ranger
- 1 Geospatial Systems Specialist

INTO ACTION HIGHLIGHT – REGIONAL BUDGET ORGANIZATION

The Regional budget organization is celebrating their 1-year anniversary!

This organization was realigned under the Regional Office (RO) **Budget Directorate** to include direct management and responsibility of the budget at a regional scale effective April 2023. This **transformational realignment decision** was made as part of the region's continued effort to provide **budget stability, transparency, and accountability** across regional budget operations. By providing mentorship and fostering consistency and support across all units, this new structure empowers regional teams to steward the entire budget effectively, ensuring successful delivery of the Forest Service mission. This structure also grants us maximum flexibility to collectively support employees, refine processes, and manage financial resources holistically – all while upholding our core values and principles. The realignment prioritizes capacity building and teamwork across regions, enabling enhanced information sharing and seamless backups during transitions.



Outcomes Spotlight – Spring Prescribed Burning Utilizing Innovative Technology Region 1 - Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) program



On a sunny spring day in early April, a crew of Forest Service employees assembled on the Helena-Lewis and Clark National Forest to conduct a prescribed burn on a 140-acre parcel west of Toston in the Elkhorn Mountains. The Forest had prepared the area in advance for a safe and effective burn, like other prescribed burns happening that day elsewhere in the Region, with one exception. This was one of the **initial burns** in the Region which was supported by the **budding Region One UAS program**.



The UAS technology, known as **unmanned aircraft systems**, or more commonly known as drones, can be used to ignite a prescribed fire among other functions. The Alta-X aircraft, used for this mission, can fly up to two miles while igniting a fire. This mission was staffed by Nate Harrison (R1), Casey Cornils (R6), and Randy Throop (R1). This technology will help us ramp up our pace and scale of reducing hazardous fuels, contributing to the goals of the 10-year wildfire crisis strategy.

Prescribed fires often have several objectives including reducing fuels susceptible to wildfire. This prescribed fire aimed to reduce fine woody debris, less than 3 inches in diameter, and ground fuels, duff. However, the project will also improve forage for elk and mule deer, increase riparian vegetation diversity by targeting conifers, and encourage growth of Whitebark pine.

By July 2024 the R1 UAS program will have **four full time UAS pilots**. Two in Missoula and two on the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. The intent is to have **three fully functional UAS trailers** with non-collateral duty pilots to provide a UAS service to the Region and Nation. These pilots will help with our collateral-duty pilot training, proficiency, and currency. This is a first step to see what the true need of our Region is into the future. The program's intent is to nimbly and flexibly support needs throughout the Region.

