

## The Forest Service has a vision; the Stanislaus National Forest has a Plan

Benjamin Cossel & Jamie Hinrichs

USDA Forest Service

March 17, 2022

---

*Editor's note: The USDA Forest Service recently announced a [10-year strategy to confront the wildfire crisis and improve forest resilience](#). The agency will work with partners over the next decade to treat up to an additional 20 million acres on National Forest System lands and up to an additional 30 million acres of other Federal, State, Tribal, and private lands. This article highlights how partners come together to reduce risk of extreme wildfire and benefit local communities.*



Overgrown stands of mixed pine, stressed by years of drought, insects and other factors increase the risk of high-intensity wildfires, which have become common place in the American west. The Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape project will implement fuel treatments to restore forest resilience to high-intensity wildfire. USDA Forest Service Photo

Chris Trott has lived close to the Stanislaus National Forest for many years. As wildfires continue to grow in severity, intensity and frequency, he lives by one simple rule.

“I keep my bags packed for a significant portion of the year due to the looming presence of possible wildfires,” said Trott, add that “seeing fuel reduction and fuel breaks will give me a lot of comfort.”

For some people, the words fuel reduction and fuel breaks may seem like technical terms reserved for wildfire experts. But more and more, people who live and work near forests are learning about the benefit of proactive land management to mitigate high-intensity wildfires.

This is where a new initiative brings together people like Trott. The Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape project aims to restore forest health, reduce the risk of high-intensity wildfire, and benefit local communities. The Stanislaus National Forest will serve as testing ground and model for wildland communities across the country, putting the [USDA Forest Service's Confronting the Wildfire Crisis](#) strategy into action.

“The project is the largest green forest, wildfire preparedness, and drought-resiliency project that’s ever been planned to a point of potential approval in the Sierra Nevada,” said John Buckley, executive director of the Central Sierra Environmental Resource Center and vice-chair of the [Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions](#).

The Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape project encompasses approximately 117,000 acres located within the Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions collaborative area, south and east of the North Fork Stanislaus River and north and west of the Highway 108.

The forest developed the Social and Ecological Resilience Across the Landscape project in cooperation with Yosemite Stanislaus Solutions, using cutting-edge technology, and incorporating public feedback. Proposed treatments within the project area include thinning and mastication, while also protecting critical wildlife habitat. This fuel reduction will establish conditions for prescribed burning and provide protection for private lands and communities adjacent to the forest.

The California spotted owl is one of the many creatures who call the Stanislaus National Forest home. Long-term studies indicate that the populations are in decline due in part to habitat loss stemming from large, high-severity fires and large-scale tree mortality from drought and bark beetle impacts. Restoring forest health will help species such as the California spotted owl to thrive again. USDA Forest Service Photo

The project, shaped by an understanding that sustainable landscapes and sustainable communities go hand in hand, will also serve as a framework that can be used throughout the country. The project is not only designed to support healthy forests and mitigate wildfire risk, but also to support the local community, provide benefits for residents and bolster local economies. Some of these opportunities include a workforce development program at a community college, material for local biomass facilities and business for local timber and trucking companies. Reducing the risk of high-intensity wildfire will also fortify local [businesses reliant on tourism and recreation](#), and safeguard the Lyon's Dam canal, which provides water to 95% of Tuolumne County.



Flumes managed by the Tuolumne Utility District, which carries thousands of gallons of drinking water to the residents of Tuolumne County are located within the Stanislaus National Forest. Courtesy photo by Tuolumne Utility District

“We cannot do this work alone and would not want to even if we could,” said Jason Kuiken, Forest Supervisor of the Stanislaus National Forest. “By doing this as a collaboration, we make better decisions and get to share in the successes.”