

# Restoring America's Headwaters

*"Ultimately, our success at the Forest Service will be measured in terms of watershed health on those 193 million acres of National Forests and Grasslands."*

-Tom Tidwell, U.S. Forest Service Chief, 2010.



**As the largest single source of water in the United States, the National Forest System is a priceless resource for the American public.** Through its

Restoring America's Headwaters program, the National Forest Foundation (NFF) seeks to **restore** impaired watersheds of the National Forest System and **engage**

Americans in active watershed restoration and stewardship projects to promote a broader appreciation for the critical importance of National Forests and Grasslands to America's water supply. This program supports a long-term vision of dynamic, healthy National Forests that continue to provide abundant, clean water for a diversity of needs despite many challenges. We are working toward a future in which:

- Watersheds on National Forests are resilient to natural and human disturbances and are capable of adapting to changing conditions in the future.
- Communities throughout the country enjoy reliable supplies of clean water from rivers that flow from National Forests and Grasslands, as well as many other benefits that healthy, functioning rivers provide—ranging from recreational access to protecting private property from flood damage.
- Dynamic aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems support thriving native plant and animal communities.
- Partners and communities are actively engaged in restoration and stewardship of watersheds on National Forests and Grasslands.
- Americans recognize and value the water-related ecosystem services from National Forests and Grasslands.

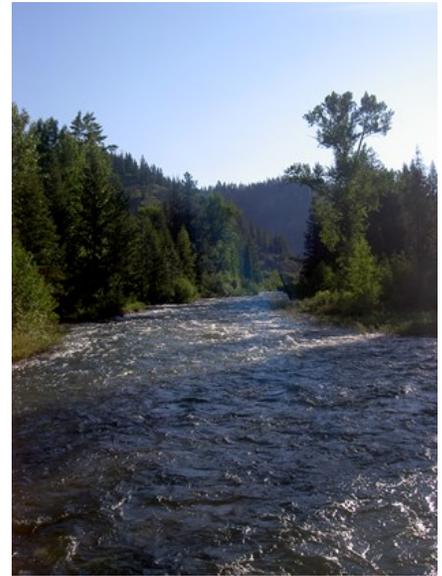
This is a long-term vision that will require addressing a number of challenges, including:

- Increasingly common and severe landscape-scale fires cause widespread erosion and sedimentation to watersheds that are critical for America's water supply.
- The warming climate and reduced snowpack in many mountainous areas restricts water supplies and leaves forests vulnerable to insect infestation, disease and drought-related mortality.
- Declining funding for the U.S. Forest Service endangers important watershed restoration activities, leaving the agency increasingly reliant on support from the private sector for watershed management and restoration.
- Few Americans are aware of the importance of National Forests to their water supply. There is an educational challenge that must be addressed to generate public support for the investment necessary to restore America's critical headwaters.

The NFF seeks to achieve the long-term vision and address ongoing challenges through a variety of activities organized under the overall goal of *Restoring America's Headwaters*. The examples below are organized around the two major focus areas of restoration and engagement.

## 1. Restoring National Forest Watersheds

Watershed restoration is an ecosystem-wide endeavor. The NFF supports comprehensive restoration work through targeted investments in priority watersheds, leveraging valuable corporate and foundation support to accomplish this work and providing demonstrable results for our partners. Our restoration activities fall under three main categories:



- **Post-fire Reforestation** - While fire plays an important role in many forest types, the degraded forest health that's become typical of many of our National Forests has predisposed many of our forests to larger and more severe wildfires. These severe wildfires threaten water supplies through increased erosion and sedimentation. By strategically investing in post-fire restoration, we are reducing downstream sedimentation and improving water quality.
- **Riparian Restoration** - Riparian areas regulate stream channels, water temperatures, and nutrient flow. By investing in prioritized riparian restoration projects through a variety of programs, we are able to significantly improve stream health and fish habitat by improving water quality and regulating water temperatures.
- **Stream Restoration** - Natural events and historic management practices have resulted in modified stream channels that can adversely impact downstream flows. Our investments in stream restoration are improving miles of fish and wildlife habitat and enhancing reliable stream flows for downstream use.

### Partnerships at Work

To accomplish this work, the NFF brings support from our corporate and foundation partners to invest in watershed health in priority areas. Our growing network of partners has allowed us to *convert every \$1 of private investment into \$4 of stewardship work*.

Through our *Treasured Landscapes, Unforgettable Experiences* conservation campaign, we are addressing outstanding landscape-scale watershed restoration needs on 14 iconic sites across the country. In addition, the NFF's tree-planting program reforests critical watersheds that have been damaged by severe wildfire or other natural events. Our granting program allows local non-profit partners to achieve positive riparian and stream restoration outcomes.

#### **Hayman Restoration Partnership**

In 2002, the Hayman Fire raged through the Pike National forest, burning nearly 138,000 acres. In its wake, the fire severely impacted the water source for over a million Colorado's residents by increasing sedimentation and erosion in the watershed that supplies the City of Denver. With a wide range of partners and a total investment of more than \$5 million, the NFF is working to restore the Upper South Platte watershed through targeted stream, upland and riparian restoration activities.

**Support for this project came from the following corporations and foundations:**

- ◇ Vail
- ◇ The Coca Cola Company
- ◇ Aurora Water
- ◇ The Gates Family Foundation

## NFF Accomplishments and Opportunities

Working toward healthy and resilient watersheds on National Forests is no easy task. Our watershed restoration accomplishments to date include more than 3,000 miles of streams restored or surveyed and more than 4 million trees and shrubs planted in upland and riparian areas of watersheds. While our impact continues to grow, there is still significant opportunity to broaden our watershed restoration impact. The U.S. Forest Service classifies nearly half of watersheds on National Forests and Grasslands as either “functioning at risk” or “impaired function.” Some estimate that even with aggressive watershed restoration and improvement activities, we may not see the results of our efforts for many decades. With this in mind, the NFF is expanding its *Restoring America’s Headwaters* program to strategically focus investments on watersheds where there is hope of making a significant difference.

## 2. Engaging Citizens in Watershed Restoration

As we pursue our mission of restoring impaired watersheds, we engage individuals and communities to build a sense of ownership and pride in our National Forest headwaters. People who have spent time by their favorite creek, explored a new trail, or spent a Saturday restoring a stream, understand that our forested watersheds are fundamental to our national identity and are a legacy we must pass on to future generations. We are increasing local watershed stewardship on our National Forests and Grasslands by:

- **Growing Our Network**- It takes more than just a single agency or organization to work toward healthy headwaters. With this in mind, the NFF is dedicated to growing our network of dedicated, skilled organizations to address watershed restoration efforts at the local level.
- **Engaging Individuals** - There is no better way to foster a sense of ownership and responsibility than to engage people in actual restoration projects—giving them the chance to see the benefits of stewardship and feel the satisfaction of making a difference through their work. The NFF provides volunteers the opportunity to engage in hands-on projects throughout the nation.

Involving individuals and communities in watershed stewardship provides further leverage for our work by expanding the number and quality of skills dedicated to ensuring successful restoration outcomes. The NFF offers a suite of grant programs supporting place-based organizations to accomplish on-the-ground watershed restoration work and build the organizational capacity of local non-profit groups.

Additionally, the NFF hosts volunteer *Friends of the Forest*® days to engage citizens in the hands-on stewardship of National Forests and to promote positive, family-friendly outdoor experiences.

### **Replenishing Coca-Cola’s Water Use**

As part of their strategy for becoming water neutral by the year 2020, the Coca-Cola Company has partnered with the NFF to restore Colorado’s Trail Creek watershed that serves their nearby bottling facility. Coca-Cola’s \$150,000 contribution funded important stream channel work to retain and reduce sediment generated by the Hayman Fire of 2002.



### **Trees For Change**

In partnership with the Salt River Project (SRP), the NFF is engaging SRP’s customers to contribute to post-fire restoration on Northern Arizona’s forests. Through this joint effort, SRP and its customers have contributed \$585,850 and planted more than 524,000 trees to improve and protect the upland forests that capture and supply water for the greater Phoenix area.

### **Restoring Clear Creek**

The NFF and Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest continue to host MillerCoors through the NFF's Friends of the Forest Days. Activities include riparian and wetland restoration in the Clear Creek watershed. MillerCoors contributions began in 2007 and total more than \$350,000.

Although most Americans remain unaware of the source of their water, we are making inroads in raising awareness and fostering a broad sense of ownership of our National Forest headwaters. As a result of hosting over 100 *Friends of the Forest* days, the NFF has engaged over 5,000 volunteers, including over 1,000 youth. Through the NFF's granting program, over 82,025 volunteers have been engaged in stewardship and restoration projects on National Forests, including over 23,000 youth. While the NFF has played a key role in connecting Americans to their headwaters, there is tremendous opportunity for increasing involvement by individuals and communities across the National Forest System.

### **Moving Forward**

Achieving our vision of healthy, resilient National Forest watersheds is not a job for agencies alone. In the face of complex challenges and limited federal resources, watershed health on National Forests will depend on positive restoration outcomes and lasting citizen engagement. As the only Congressionally-chartered non-profit partner of the U.S. Forest Service, the NFF is uniquely positioned to generate successful restoration outcomes and engage Americans in the process. With a growing network of corporate, foundation and non-profit partners, we are expanding our work to address the immense restoration challenges on our National Forest headwaters.

For more information on the NFF's *Restoring America's Headwaters* program, please contact Wes Swaffar at [wswaffar@nationalforests.org](mailto:wswaffar@nationalforests.org) or (406) 830-3356.



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