USDA California Climate Hub
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Management Handbook for Small Parcel Landowners in the Sierra Nevada and Southern Cascades

Why manage your land?

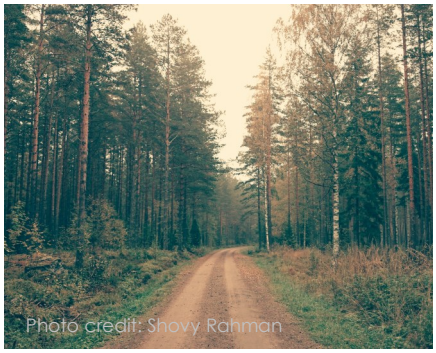


Photo credit: Shovy Rahman

Forest lands in the Sierra and Cascades need attention due to the significant changes in forest conditions over the last 100 years. Trees are dying at accelerated rates, forest fires are becoming larger and more intense, and changing climates forecast worsening conditions in the coming years and decades.

However, managing forest land can be a difficult task. The *Forest Management Handbook for Small Parcel Landowners* details how to build a California Cooperative Forest Management Plan and provides worksheets to collect the necessary information. Such a plan will help you determine what management actions are appropriate for your land, how to obtain technical and financial support and which, if any, permits may be necessary. The Handbook is available on the USFS Pacific Southwest Research Station website.

Your land matters

Investments in forest health today may lessen fire risk to your neighbor's home, provide clean water, and prolong enjoyment of your forest for years to come. Forest health is a shared responsibility and landowners like you directly impact success.

Collectively, small parcel landowners represent 9 million forested acres. State and federal governments have committed to making the Wildfire and Forest Resilience Action Plan a reality (https://fmtf.fire.ca.gov/), but without help from landowners like you, efforts to rebuild forest health and reduce catastrophic wildfire won't be as impactful.

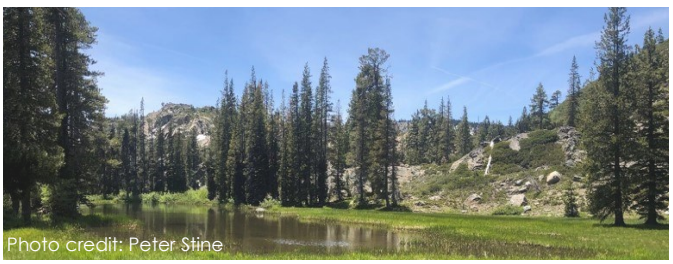


Photo credit: Peter Stine

Who is this Guide for?

The Handbook is for landowners in the Sierra Nevada and Southern Cascades region who own and manage approximately 100 acres or less of conifer and hardwood forests and woodlands. This resource can assist landowners who have had the property in their family for generations as well as landowners who have just purchased the property and are starting from square one.

Evaluating in 4 Steps

The Handbook describes how to create a management plan in 4 steps; this can be done individually or in collaboration with a Registered Professional Forester. The process is detailed in simple terms and will show you how to collect the key data needed to develop a site-specific plan.

Step 1: Define your forest management objectives

There are many objectives for owning small tracts of private forest lands. Some common examples fall into categories of:

* Recreation and aesthetic enjoyment
* Timber production
* Minor forest products (e.g., firewood)
* Ensuring forest health is sustained

Step 2: Assess your current conditions

If you've owned your property for several years you likely noticed changes in the forest, and if your property has been in your family for generations then you have certainly observed some significant change. Taking stock of the condition of your forest will allow you to determine what actions, if any, may be necessary to achieve your objectives.

The Handbook will help you gather key information about your forest and the land it grows on. For instance, it offers instructions for:

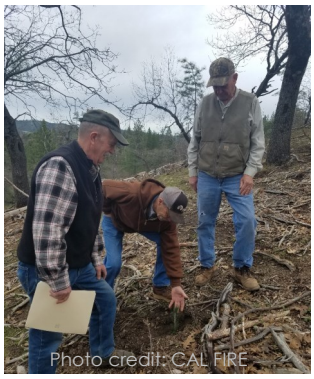


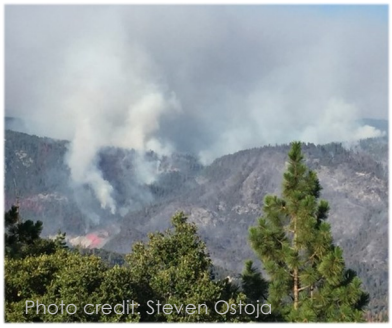
Photo credit: CAL FIRE

* Measuring the diameter of trees
* Identifying the tree species present on your land
* Gathering information on the general climate (temperature and precipitation)
* Identifying disease in your trees
* Estimating slope steepness

Step 3: Recognize threats to your forest

It's important to evaluate how the health of your forest will affect its response to inevitable and typical forest stressors and disturbances (such as periodic threat of fire, insects, drought).

The Handbook will provide guidance on how to determine if stressors and disturbances like fire, insects, or drought stress are likely to become a threat that could destroy your forest.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Step 4: Evaluate your treatment options

Once you have *defined your objectives*, *assessed the conditions* that currently occur in your forest, and *determined what threats* are facing your forest, you can evaluate treatment options.

The Handbook will help you determine which options for modifying vegetation are most appropriate for meeting your goals and for your forest. These options often fall into 3 categories:

* mechanical treatments (e.g. cutting down selected trees or shredding shrubs)
* burning piles or using prescribed fire
* planting desired species


Photo credit: Beverly Joseph