

Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Resilience Strategy

Mission and Values

MISSION

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition uses a pro-active, collaborative approach to improve the health and long-term resilience of forested watersheds and communities by addressing wildfire. The Coalition works to build support, understanding, and shared knowledge of the role of fire in an adaptive framework to realize our goals. Our primary goal is to identify and implement high priority on-the-ground projects that make the Fireshed and its communities more resilient to wildfire while maintaining and restoring resilient landscapes. This goal will be realized when fire is used as a tool for management throughout our fire adapted forests, and communities in and adjacent to these forests become fire adapted - they understand the role of fire and are prepared for its occurrence.

Community goals are to foster Fire Adapted Communities - to increase and maintain preparedness, mitigation, and planning at multiple levels so that communities are prepared for, can respond to, and recover from wildfire.

Additional goals are to increase the resilience of the forests and watersheds of the Fireshed to drought, insects and disease, and climate change, and by doing so:

- Protect lives from wildfire and post-fire flooding events,
- Protect community water sources of the City of Santa Fe and surrounding communities from wildfire,
- Reduce the risk homes, private property, and public infrastructure face from wildfire and post-fire flooding, and to
- Increase the resilience of the forests and watersheds of the Fireshed to drought, insects and disease, and climate change.

Background

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed is an [area](#) of concern for the City of Santa Fe, Santa Fe County, the Pueblo of Tesuque, the Santa Fe National Forest, the communities within and adjacent to its boundary, those who recreate and enjoy this majestic landscape, and the tourism and ecotourism economies that benefit from it. Forest, fire and water managers agree that after more than a century of fire suppression this area is at great risk to high-severity wildfire. Such an event would not only negatively affect the forested areas for decades, it could endanger a major portion of Santa Fe's water supply by removing the forests that retain the snowpack, and release post-fire debris and sediment flows into the city's two reservoirs. Post-fire erosion and flooding could endanger the public, damage homes, road infrastructure, and restrict access to the Santa Fe Ski Basin, a major economic driver in the community.

Released in 2014, the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy was developed by federal, state, tribal and local government representatives as well as stakeholders. The Strategy calls on land managers to work collaboratively across boundaries and use the best science to 1) safely and effectively respond to wildfire; 2) restore and maintain fire resilient landscapes, and 3) promote fire-adapted communities. In December 2015 the New Mexico State Forester Tony Delfin and the City of Santa Fe Fire Chief Erik Litzenberg convened a meeting of municipal, county, state, federal, and non-profit partners to discuss the Santa Fe Fireshed. In January 2016, the Santa Fe City Council adopted the Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Resolution. In February 2016 the Santa Fe Board of County Commissioners adopted a Greater Santa Fe Fireshed resolution as well.

The Greater Santa Fe Fireshed Coalition is comprised of organizations and individuals who are working to improve the ecological condition of the area through the development and implementation of the Resilience Strategy. The Resilience Strategy will create an agreed upon foundation for the Coalition members to anchor and guide their work. The Coalition includes (groups can be added as support grows):

- New Mexico State Forestry
- Pueblo of Tesuque
- Santa Fe Watershed Association
- City of Santa Fe Fire Department
- City of Santa Fe Water Division
- Santa Fe County
- Santa Fe National Forest: Espanola and Pecos Ranger Districts
- Region 3 of the USDA Forest Service
- The Nature Conservancy
- The Forest Stewards Guild
- Wildfire Network
- Santa Fe – Pojoaque Soil and Water Conservation District
- Natural Resource Conservation Service
- New Mexico Forest Industry Association
- USGS Jemez Mountain Field Station
- New Mexico Forest and Watershed Restoration Institute

What is a Fireshed?

Wildfire moves across the land based on vegetation, wind, and terrain. With dry and windy conditions, wildfires can spread across large landscapes, often moving across drainages and watersheds. A watershed corresponds to the flow of water from mountain top to river bottom. Wildfires can burn at a large scale that connects the high country with downstream communities and resources. In order to take steps to be adapted to wildfire, we need to think and act at the scale of a wildfire – over large landscapes, crossing property boundaries, and through high and low density communities. Social and ecological concerns regarding wildfire overlap and are intertwined in a fireshed.

Why do we need to think and act like a fireshed?

We use the term fireshed to promote the recognition that fire is an ordinary occurrence in the landscape around Santa Fe. Fire is necessary for healthy functioning ecosystems. There are fire adapted ecosystems all around the world. Where ignitions (lightning) and dry climate overlap, ecologists find fire adapted vegetation. The southern Sangre de Cristo Mountains have a variety of different fire adapted ecosystems with physical evidence of wildfire dating back hundreds and thousands of years. If we wish to be fire adapted communities within these ecosystems, we need to think at the fireshed scale.

Collaborative Values

The Coalition has identified these values in the Fireshed that could be affected by fire and post-fire events:

- Traditional cultural landscape uses by the Pueblo of Tesuque including:
 - Irrigation for agriculture.
 - Hunting as a traditional use.

- Forest products for ceremonial purposes.
 - Other traditional uses.
- Maintain acequias and water used for agricultural irrigation, particularly for indigenous and traditional communities.
- Healthy forests and watersheds that support biological diversity, by ensuring habitat for wildlife and resilient plant communities
- Maintain economic vitality of the Santa Fe area economy as it relates to water availability, real estate, recreation, tourism, and other ecosystem services that are at-risk from wildfire.
- Conserve water resources that are vital to communities and their long-term sustainability.
- Consider roadless characteristics when developing management plans.

Furthermore, the Coalition has identified additional social goals. These are to increase public understanding and acceptance of:

- The ecological role of smoke in understory diversity.
- Wildfire as a natural process.
- Wildfire, fire adapted ecosystems, and land management options and techniques.