

## Arizona Voters Tax Themselves for Logging

by Matt Arno, Community Forester, Clearwater Resource Council

Last November, voters in the City of Flagstaff Arizona passed Ballot Question 405 to tax themselves to the tune of \$10 million to “log” a portion of the forests adjacent to their community. Most of us in Western Montana would scoff at such a proposal. We are accustomed to logging making money or at least paying for itself. However, the residents of Flagstaff agreed that this action was necessary to protect their drinking water and parts of their city from flooding.

Flagstaff is similar to Missoula in many ways. It is a mountain town of approximately 65,000 people, home to Northern Arizona University, which is in the Big Sky conference and has a forestry school. The local ski area is Arizona Snow Bowl. Flagstaff gets its water from forested watersheds just as Missoula used to get its water from the Rattlesnake watershed. In the 1980’s Missoula switched to pumping from the aquifer below the city because of a giardia problem in Rattlesnake Creek, but the Rattlesnake water system is still maintained in case there is a time when there is a need to resume using it. This might be necessary if the aquifer becomes contaminated or if electricity to run the pumps becomes too expensive.

The name Flagstaff comes from a towering ponderosa pine made into a flagpole by an exploration party from Boston to celebrate the United States Centennial on July 4, 1876. In 1876 the forests around Flagstaff were very open-grown as a result of frequent low-intensity fires--blazes even more frequent than those that occurred in the valleys of western Montana. Several studies of fire history in the forests of northern Arizona have shown that, prior to 1900, fires recurred at intervals averaging less than 5 years. This abundance of fire is attributed to luxuriant grass undergrowth, ignited by frequent lightning storms and by Native Americans. Since the forest understory burned so often, most small trees were killed, but the large trees survived these light fires. This pattern of burning helped create vast ponderosa pine forests dominated by large trees. The historic fire intervals in the lower elevation valleys of western Montana generally averaged between 7 and 25 years, which also created open-grown forests in many areas.

Elimination of frequent fires and logging that removed primarily large trees has dramatically changed the structure of our low-elevation forests.

The change in northern Arizona's forests over the past 135 years has been even more pronounced than those in western Montana. As a result of long-term suppression of fires and high-grade logging, Arizona's forests are now choked with at least ten times the number of trees. This has created forests of small, unhealthy trees, that now burn in intense stand-replacing fires, such as the half-million-acre Wallow Fire in 2011, which also destroyed 32 homes.

The residents of Flagstaff became concerned about their watershed and the drinking water that comes from it after seeing flood damage from the nearby Schultz fire in 2010. Research and recent fire activity suggest that it is highly probable that Flagstaff's two watersheds will experience a high-severity burn within the next 20 years and also, that such a fire could result in flooding ten times as damaging as a 100-year flood event, inundating much of the city and the campus of Northern Arizona University. Such a fire would severely impact water quality requiring expensive upgrades to the water treatment plant while reducing the storage capacity of the cities reservoir.

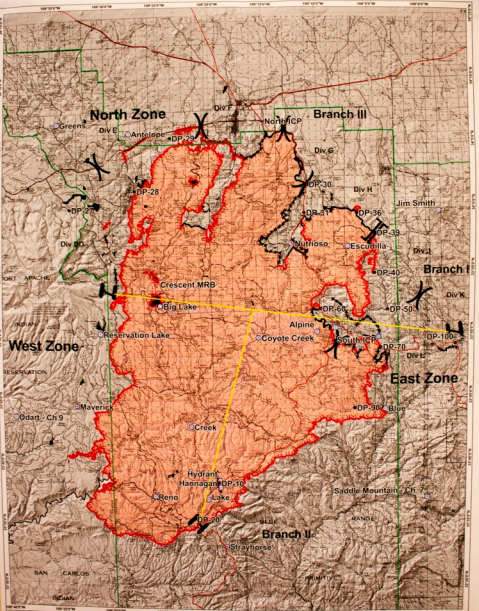
What voters approved is not a traditional logging project. It is a thinning and fuels reduction treatment designed to make the watershed's forests healthier and more resistant to significant fire damage. The residents of Flagstaff agreed that ecologically appropriate thinning and prescribed burning would be a good investment. Research studies have shown that well designed treatments are effective and significantly reduce the costs of firefighting.

Flagstaff is located in the middle of the world's largest ponderosa pine forest. Northern Arizona University's mascot is the Lumberjack, but much like Missoula there are no longer any major wood processing facilities in Flagstaff. More significantly there are no major wood processing facilities in all of Arizona anymore. As a result of the loss of infrastructure there is no place to sell the logs generated by the project and even if there are nice logs produced they are not really worth anything because there is no one to buy them within a reasonable

distance. The lack of mills also means there is a scarcity of loggers, logging equipment, and the experience needed for conducting harvest treatments.

We are lucky in Montana to still have some logging and mill infrastructure to help us afford to manage our forests without a bond issue. However, anyone who has been paying attention to the wood products industry knows our situation is only a few more mill closures away from matching Arizona's. So, if you think you may need to improve the health and fire-safety of your forest, now is the time to get it done. Delay may lead to regret. Cost-share funding is available for fuels reduction, forest improvement projects on private lands.

The Clearwater Resource Council has recently hired Matt Arno as a community forester to assist landowners in the Clearwater drainage with fuels reduction and forest health issues. Matt is working with Colin Moon from the Bitterroot RC&D and the Seeley Swan Fuels Reduction Task force on fuels reduction and forest health improvement in the Seeley Lake Area. Matt is also the Forestry Coordinator for the Blackfoot Challenge. For 18 years Matt was a partner and head forester for Woodland Restoration Inc., a forestry consulting and contracting company. For additional information or assistance developing a fuels reduction project on your land or to learn about possible funding opportunities, contact Matt at [forester@crcmt.org](mailto:forester@crcmt.org) or phone 244-6265. Grant applications are available at the Seeley Lake Fire Hall and on the web at [www.crcmt.org](http://www.crcmt.org).



**Wallowa North Zone Incident**

Day Operational Period  
6/18/2011  
1000 hours 0600 - 2000 hours 1700  
Map Coordinates: 46° 00' 00" N 116° 00' 00" W

North Zone	Incident Area	Water Source	Incident Command Post
West Zone	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post
East Zone	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post
Branch I	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post
Branch II	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post
Branch III	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post
Branch IV	Staging Area	Incident Command Post	Incident Command Post



