

INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR Increasing Forest and Fire Management Capacity in California



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Background

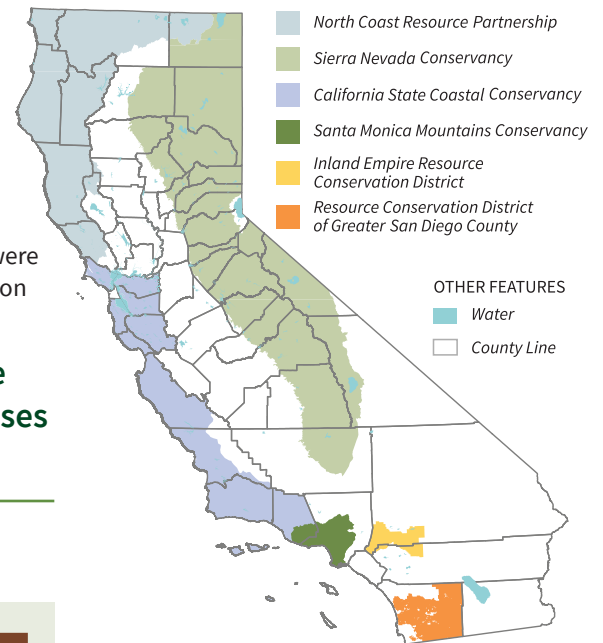
The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) program seeks to increase capacity to prioritize, develop, and implement projects consistent with the goals of the California Forest Carbon Plan and Executive Order B-52-18. The RFFC program uses a block grant approach to deliver funding to regional entities who then oversee planning and implementation of landscape-level forest health projects.

The Watershed Research and Training Center (the Watershed Center) engaged Oregon State University to assess entities active in forest and/or fire management in California. This assessment was administered as an online survey from September – October 2019, and a total of 227 usable responses were recorded. Only one response per entity was allowed, and respondents were encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues as appropriate. Respondents included: nonprofit organizations, resource conservation districts, tribes, collaborative groups, and fire safe councils. Questions were primarily focused on seven broad types of capacity: monitoring, planning, collaboration and partnerships, outreach, implementation, cultural fire, and organizational.

The assessment is intended to better describe and illuminate what forest and fire management capacities are, who possesses or needs them within California, and why they matter.

The Regional Forest and Fire Capacity (RFFC) Program Block Grantee Coverage Areas within California

RFFC REGIONAL BLOCK GRANT AWARDEE COVERAGE AREAS



About Respondents

- Approximately two-thirds of respondents were from the Sierras, Cascades, northern Coast Ranges, and Klamath-Siskiyou areas, and were engaged in conifer-forest-ecosystem types.
- The most common entities to take the assessment were fire safe councils (19 percent) and nonprofits (18 percent).
- A majority of entities only had a quarter or less of their budget dedicated to forest and/or fire management.
- The majority of respondents had fairly small staffs, although staff size varied widely.

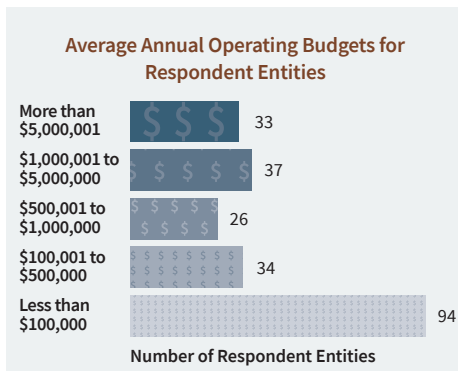
Top Barriers Reported

- ▶ Inadequate funding for forest and/or fire management (~50%)
- ▶ Administrative time and costs (38%)
- ▶ Lack of available workforce (29%)

The median staff size (including all employee types) was four.

- Forty-two percent of assessment respondents indicated that their entity had an average annual operating budget of \$100,000 or less per year, and over half had a budget of less than \$500,000.
- State grants or agreements were most commonly identified as a major source of support for forest and/or fire management; other major sources were federal grants or agreements and volunteer labor.
- Respondents most wanted to develop or enhance their relationships with regional, county, or local entities, particularly county governments and other fire safe councils.

A large majority (87 percent) reported that direct funding for them to address their needs themselves would be a “very useful” format for capacity building. Smaller majorities also stated that connections to peers working on similar issues and peer exchanges would be very useful.



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Capacities

CAPACITIES CURRENTLY POSSESSED

- The most common specific capacity type that respondents currently possessed was the administration and management of funds, agreements, and/or contracts.
- On average, 35 percent of respondents stated that they had capacities in the outreach category, and 34 percent had collaboration and partnership capacities.
- More respondents reported currently having several outreach capacities than capacities from any other category (43–47 percent, depending on who the outreach was to).

Many respondents also reported that they had the ability to develop partnerships between public land managers and private landowners, and to identify shared priorities (or values) among multiple stakeholders.

- Greatest current strengths included: partnerships with other entities such as other local organizations and state agencies; interest, commitment, passion, desire to steward, and willingness from local residents and partners; having a strong group of volunteers; project management skills; and grant writing skills.

CAPACITIES TO ADD OR ENHANCE

- A majority of respondents wanted to build knowledge-related capacities for various types of monitoring, and to better understand and analyze values at risk (i.e., priorities), assets, and other capitals in both biophysical and human areas. These included: 1) Monitoring impacts on fire resilience; 2) GIS mapping of human (social, cultural, and/or economic) values related to fire; 3) GIS mapping of biophysical resources, and 4) Monitoring of carbon savings.

On average, only 10 percent of respondents currently had capacities in the implementation category.

- Identifying indigenous practitioner burn boss standards and supporting partner efforts regarding cultural burning were the most chosen among tribes for enhancement or addition. There was no capacity that a majority of tribes reported already having or not needing. Fifteen tribes responded to the assessment, and additional in-person outreach is needed to understand their capacity needs more fully.
- Other top-desired capacities included: planning, development of outreach materials, designing fuel treatments in and around communities, implementing defensible space programs, and conducting local workforce capacity assessments, increasing the number

Questions to ask before investing in capacity include:

- ▶ What are the goals and desired outcomes of increasing capacity?
- ▶ What is the existing funding strategy and structure for this work, and how might new investments interface with this current system?
- ▶ What are the current local and regional organizational ecosystems, and how would capacity investments affect those?
- ▶ What capacities do the most entities perceive needing? Do entities each need them individually or collectively?
- ▶ What capacities do entities already possess?
- ▶ How should baseline capacity (i.e., ripeness) and equity be considered in investment decisions?
- ▶ What formats and venues will be most effective for building capacity?

of staff with fire experience (and number of staff overall) recruiting and training volunteers, obtaining funding, and grant writing.

Key Implications and Recommendations at the State Level

This assessment revealed substantial and diverse needs for capacity building.

- Continued and deliberate investment could include approaches such as: 1) Expanding flexibility in existing grant programs to more explicitly fund capacity building functions such as participation in trainings, coordination and partnership development, and planning; 2) Providing non-competitive awards to local groups for baseline operational capacities and serving in their coordination and planning role; and 3) Increasing investment in California's re-emerging Watershed Coordinators grant program.

- The scope and scale of these needs also suggests the importance of being strategic in leveraging investments.
- The common interests of many respondents in scientific and technical capacities (particularly those related to monitoring and GIS) suggest a need to offer targeted trainings and the opportunity for increased connectivity with entities that have these capacities. Increasing practitioner access to public resources such as CAL FIRE's Fire and Resource Assessment Program (FRAP) personnel and tools, academic institutions, and Cooperative Extension agents may help to supplement and build these capacities.

- State and federal government permitting processes or requirements (e.g., CEQA, NEPA) were among the top barriers for about a quarter of assessment respondents. Cutting the green tape could facilitate local groups focusing on coordination, strategic partnerships, and growing implementation capacity.
- Given the continued interest in building the capacity for forest and/or fire management work at smaller scales such as neighborhoods and communities, there may be a need to continue to invest locally.

There is strong interest in receiving capacity assistance from peers.

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