



**REGIONAL FOREST  
HEALTH PROGRAM**



# REGIONAL FOREST HEALTH GOALS

Placer County's Board of Supervisors has identified "Healthy forest and watershed management" as a top strategic priority. Under the direction of the County Agricultural Commissioner, the RFH program works to augment existing neighborhood and community wildfire mitigation efforts with complementary strategies to improve forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic forest fires.

RFH coordinates with partners to:

- Make Placer communities, especially those in the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI), safer from catastrophic forest fires.
- Protect critical infrastructure and shared natural resources from the impacts of large, damaging forest fires.
- Strengthen existing relationships and build new partnerships with key agencies, groups, communities, and individuals who have a stake in moving forward together on forest health and wildfire risk reduction goals.
- Increase the amount of forest health and wildfire risk reduction work happening on the ground in Placer and adjacent counties.



BEFORE AND AFTER OF THINNED FOREST

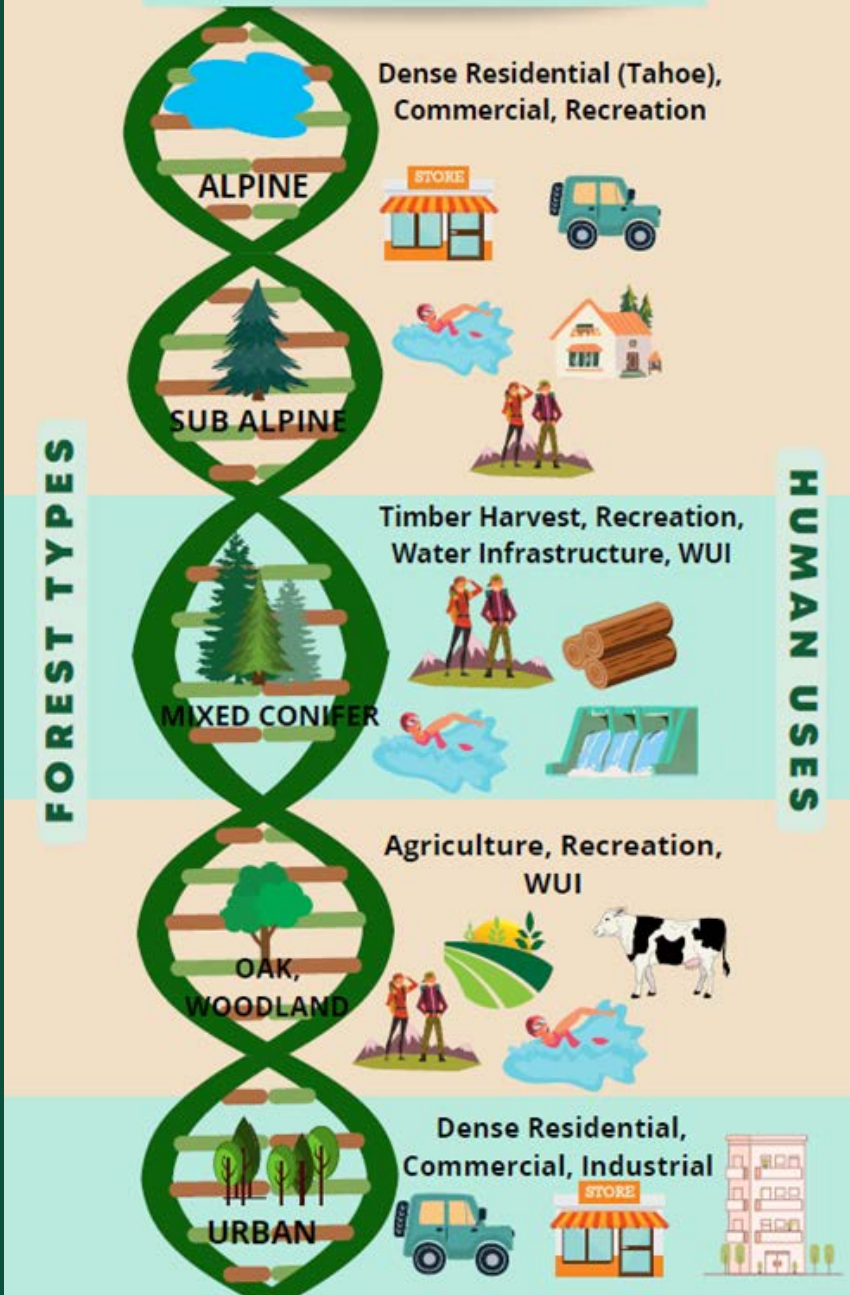
# PLACER FOREST HEALTH FUNDAMENTALS



Forest health and wildfire resilience are critical to Placer County because:

- 75% of the County is forested or WUI;
- Placer is one of the 10 California counties most affected by tree mortality;
- Placer has more habitable structures in the fire-prone WUI than any other California county;
- Much of the County is rated by CAL FIRE as High or Very High fire hazard;
- Critical shared infrastructure traverses the area (e.g., Interstate 80, Union Pacific/Amtrak Railroads, Kinder Morgan gas pipeline, and the Middle Fork hydropower and water distribution facilities).

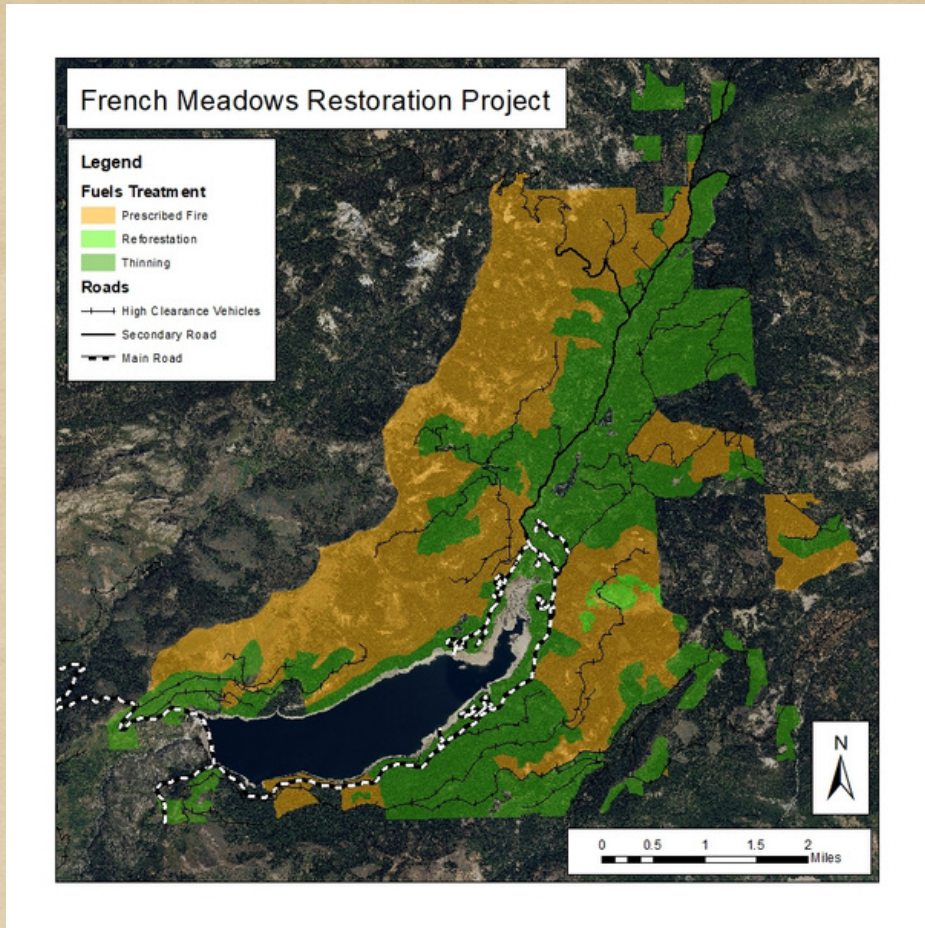
# LIFELINE OF FOREST HEALTH



**The Best Defense is a Strong Offense!**



# FRENCH MEADOWS



The RFH program is currently managing ongoing, multi-year forest restoration work within the 22,000-acre French Meadows project area. The French Meadows Forest Restoration Project is a collaborative, public-private partnership that is conducting more than 12,000 acres of treatments designed to restore forest health and resilience and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the American River, a critical municipal watershed located in the Tahoe National Forest in California's Sierra Nevada.



# PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Protecting life, property, and community safety is paramount. Along with that comes the need to protect shared landscape-level resources, such as clean water, clean air, renewable energy, sustainable wildlife habitat, safe recreation, and clear travel corridors.

Placer County's Regional Forest Health (RFH) program works collaboratively with County departments and external partners, such as CAL FIRE and USFS, and other stakeholders to identify, prioritize, and align forest health and wildfire risk reduction goals and helps to develop projects to increase the resilience of critical built and natural infrastructure and other shared watershed resources that serve Placer County and beyond.

## RFH AREAS OF FOCUS

- Landscape-level fuel treatment work to make surrounding forests more resilient to fire and other disturbances, reduce excess fuel, provide safe staging areas for firefighting, and moderate fire behavior.
- Biomass Utilization as a means of disposing of excess forest material and residential green waste in a controlled setting.
- Community and Agency Fire Mitigation to align strategies within Placer County and with neighboring counties and support the important work that is already taking place.
- Advocacy on legislative and regulatory issues to increase on-the-ground forest health and wildfire resilience work.

# CALFRAME BIOMASS AGGREGATION HUB

A state-sponsored pilot program designed to explore the feasibility of centralizing the collection of and contracting for biomass feedstock material at the regional level. Previous research has identified the lack of long-term feedstock contracts as one of the primary barriers to wood product market development. The Tahoe-Central Sierra region is one of five pilots funded through the State's 2021 Wildfire and Forest Resilience Expenditure Package to develop regionally-focused recommendations for how best to address the challenges around local disposal and beneficial use of excess woody biomass generated by ecological forest restoration and wildfire risk reduction projects in the region. The State chose Placer County Water Agency as the lead investigating agency for this project to explore rural water agencies' unique role in regional forest management. The project will result in research reports and a set of recommendations for organizing a potential public entity that can aggregate and manage biomass collection, transport, and utilization contracting for project proponents and other entities desiring such streamlining support.

# LAND TENDER

Land Tender, a cloud-based visual scenario-building and decision support application for accelerated forest management planning and disturbance risk mitigation in wildland-connected communities. Land Tender allows forest collaboratives to move into final treatment plan details and the environmental regulatory process within months instead of years.

## Project Goals

The primary goals of this project are to:

- Generate a comprehensive risk assessment for the majority of Placer County.
- Create individual sequenced projects that include:
  - Approximate resources required by project.
  - Implementation costs.
  - Avoided loss due to likely treatments.
  - Estimates of the ecological benefit of likely treatments.
- Enable a significant increase in the pace and scale of forest restoration work in the project area by streamlining the planning process. This ultimately will lead to the implementation of risk mitigations associated with wildfire hazards and improvements to ecosystem and watershed function.



# FORESTHILL DIVIDE COMMUNITY PROTECTION PROJECT

A public-private partnership designed to implement an integrated network of fuel breaks and other forest health/wildfire risk reduction activities to protect communities (including Foresthill, Baker Ranch, Iowa Hill, and Michigan Bluff), reduce potential wildfire impacts on critical infrastructure and other values, and improve and restore forest health and resilience, especially in areas heavily impacted by insect infestation-induced tree mortality.

The initial planning area covers roughly 28,000 acres, including both federally managed lands (USFS, BLM, BOR) and private lands. The project concept was brought forward by SPI, who suggested that the County, USFS, and other partners consider augmenting SPI's already planned roadside fuel reduction work to create a more comprehensive forest health and wildfire resilience project.



# I-80 WILDFIRE RISK REDUCTION

The development of strategic shaded fuel breaks and other wildfire risk reduction and fuel management activities along a 33-mile stretch of East- and West-bound Interstate 80 from Applegate to Yuba Gap in Placer County to reduce the threat of wildfire and associated impacts on adjacent communities and protect other critical assets, such as the interstate (a major East-West and national/international good transportation and travel corridor), Union Pacific Railroad, Kinder-Morgan gas pipeline, water and electrical distribution infrastructure, recreational and cultural/historic sites, species habitat, etc. The project is being championed by grassroots leadership through the Placer-Sierra FSC, with County facilitation provided by OES. State agencies including CALTRANS and CALFIRE working to scope, partially fund, and implement the project, making this project a model for how local, county, and state agencies and entities can collaborate to address threats and minimize risk to life, property, and resources.

# FRENCH MEADOWS RESTORATION PROJECT

The 28,000-acre French Meadows Restoration Project is a collaborative, public-private partnership using an all-lands approach to restore forest health and resilience and reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire in the headwaters of the Middle Fork of the American River, a critical municipal watershed located on the Tahoe National Forest (TNF) in California's Sierra Nevada.

The project was developed by a diverse partnership, including: the USDA Forest Service, which manages most of the land within the project area; Placer County Water Agency, which manages two reservoirs downstream of the project for municipal water and hydropower; The Nature Conservancy, one of the world's largest conservation organizations; the Sierra Nevada Conservancy, a state agency and funder; Placer County, a business partner in the hydropower project; the American River Conservancy, an adjacent private landowner; and the Sierra Nevada Research Institute at UC Merced.

The French Meadows Project aims to accelerate ecologically-based forest and watershed restoration on the TNF through a shared stewardship approach involving collaborative management, diverse funding, innovative project implementation, and watershed research.

In 2018, the Forest Service signed a Decision Notice approving the French Meadows Project through a Master Stewardship Agreement between Placer County and the Tahoe National Forest. The agreement authorizes the County to treat over 12,000 acres of forested land by applying the following treatments: mechanical thinning, mastication, hand thinning, reforestation, and aspen and meadow reforestation. On-the-ground operations began in 2019 and will continue through 2024.

In addition to the work Placer County and its partners are completing, the project also involves more than 7,000 acres of prescribed burning, which is managed by The Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service.

Through this innovative collaboration, the partners are aiming not only to restore forest health and resilience in the American River Headwaters/French Meadows Project area but also to establish a model that can be used to increase the pace and scale of forest and watershed restoration and fuels reduction throughout the Sierra Nevada.

French Meadows Yearly Totals				
	2019	2020	2021	Total
Treatment Completed (in Acres)	1,066	2,155	1,010	4,231
Board feet of timber (MBF)	3.03	1	1.48	5.51
Miles of road work	18	12	4.6	34.6
Acres of mechanical thinning	370	246	151	767
Acres of mastication	300	828	283.9	1,411.9
Acres of hand thinning	225	738	31	994
Acres of campground thinning	100	97	4	201
Acres reforested	0	0	95	95

