

## FLAGSTAFF WATERSHED PROTECTION

**STATE PROGRAM:** Water Infrastructure Finance Authority of Arizona

**ASSISTANCE RECIPIENT:** City of Flagstaff

**ASSISTANCE AMOUNT:** \$6M



### PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The forests surrounding Flagstaff have evolved for thousands of years to survive frequent, low-intensity wildfires ignited by seasonal lightning storms. Over the past century, these landscapes have transformed through fire suppression-based management practices. It is now understood that these conditions increase the risk of unnatural, high-intensity fires, which impact nearby water resources. The build-up of vegetation, steadily declining precipitation, and climbing temperatures create ideal conditions for more frequent and dangerously intense wildfires. After a high-intensity fire, soils become hydrophobic, which can create flash flooding events that carry large amounts of debris, ash, chemicals, and sediment to nearby waterbodies. To protect water resources and avoid catastrophic wildfire damage, the City of Flagstaff created the Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP). The project will reduce the risk of high-intensity fires and postfire flooding across two priority watersheds. The FWPP features numerous benefits, including preserving drinking water treatment costs; protecting watershed health, human health, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, and old-growth trees; preserving property and recreational values; increased local economic prosperity; and creating restoration-based employment opportunities. This project will engage in modernized forest management practices on roughly 10,000 acres by reducing dry debris and thinning the forest by removing small and/or medium diameter trees. These practices have been proven to be effective in preventing significant environmental, financial, and social impacts from wildfires.

A resiliency project this large in scale is expensive to undertake, so the City worked with the Water Infrastructure Finance Authority of Arizona (WIFA) and the Coconino National Forest to fund the FWPP. WIFA provided a CWSRF loan for \$6 million with \$1 million in loan forgiveness to the City to invest in this \$10 million project. The environmental and public health benefits of this expansive project are numerous and support a forward approach in using modernized wildfire management techniques to create a more resilient community.

To read more about this case study, please visit <https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2022-02/2021-pisces-compendium.pdf>.