

South Dakota 2020 Forest Action Plan 5-Year Review

Highlights Report

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources' (DANR) Resource Conservation and Forestry division is dedicated to conserving, protecting, improving, and developing the natural resources of South Dakota for its citizens. We provide technical and financial assistance to private landowners, communities, industry partners, conservation districts, and counties. Through our partnerships, we work together to strengthen and ensure South Dakota's natural resources are present for generations to come.

Cooperative forestry programs are administered and implemented through a partnership between the State of South Dakota, the USDA Forest Service and other government entities. These programs include Forest Health, Forest Stewardship, Agroforestry Assistance, Urban and Community Forestry, Good Neighbor Authority and Forest Legacy. Our partnership with the South Dakota Department of Public Safety, the Wildland Fire Division, works to promote the health and protection of South Dakota's forest lands, emphasizing the reduction of risk to our communities and coordinating cooperative forest fire suppression efforts.

Conserve and Manage Working Forest Landscapes for Multiple Values and Uses.

Forest Stewardship & Forest Health

- In the last five years through collaborations, staff have completed 137 forest stewardship plans covering 25,000 acres.
- Working with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), USDA Farm Service Agency, and non-governmental organizations such as South Dakota Family Forests Association (SDFFA), the Forest Stewardship Program has provided technical and financial assistance to landowners across the state. DANR worked closely with SDFFA to assist them in securing a \$5 million Inflation Reduction Act grant in 2024.
- DANR have provided 31 virtual or in-person landowner workshops on topics ranging from silvicultural practices, available funding opportunities to landowners, carbon market and carbon sequestration and conservation easements since 2020, with an average of 2,051 technical assists per year.

Cooperative Forestry Assistance & Agroforestry Assistance

- Beginning in 2024, between October and March of every year, DANR and South Dakota State University Extension offer monthly webinars on a variety of topics such as forest health updates, suitable species for planting, pruning and maintenance of urban trees.
- Since 2017, DANR Staff have participated and engaged with the collaborative groups: Black Hills Resilient Forest Partnership and the Black Hills Invasive Plant Partnership. These groups meet monthly to quarterly and consist of a wide range of stakeholders committed to working together to ensure the sustainability and resiliency of South Dakota's forests.
- In 2025, the Agroforestry staff hosted ten windbreak educational workshops. DANR has provided over 200 windbreak renovation assistances since 2018, helping landowners maintain and improve the condition of their windbreaks.

Fire

- South Dakota Wildland Fire provides financial assistance to 115 landowners a year for fuels reduction treatments. Wildland Fire offers 100% and 80% cost share programs for landowners. Fuels reduction treatments are performed on 735 acres per year through these programs.

Good Neighbor Authority

- In July of 2023, DANR signed a Good Neighbor Authority Supplemental Project Agreement (SPA) to fund one full-time service forester and a part-time program manager. DANR hired two additional service foresters in 2024 in response to increasing demand. The following year, we signed another Black Hills National Forest-wide SPA, identifying approximately 820 acres for treatment.
- The Black Hills LiDAR project was the first project completed under 2023 SPA. Activities included the collection of field data on nearly 1,700 10th acre fixed plots. South Dakota was just one of many partners to assist in the data collection which began July 2023 and was completed January 2024. Other partners include Wyoming State Forestry and the Pennington County Natural Resource Division. These data, and the resulting LiDAR outputs will aid in the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision process by providing valuable information to better plan and implement forest management and restoration activities.

Protect Forests from Threats

Forest Stewardship

- Through partnerships with USDA NRCS, USDA Farm Services Agency, and non-governmental organizations such as SDFFA, DANR has assisted in securing \$5 million to aid private landowners in meeting their forest management goals to improve forest health and resiliency.
- DANR has provided 31 virtual or in-person landowner workshops since 2020, and an average of 2,051 technical assists per year. DANR also completed 137 Stewardship Plans covering 25,000 acres.

Forest Health

- In 2020, DANR completed the Trees Outside of Forests (TOFii) project that identified South Dakota's tree resources outside of traditional forest areas. This data was used to identify windbreaks throughout South Dakota and complete an inventory on windbreak conditions.
- DANR continues to monitor spongy moth in collaboration with Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Every year approximately 85 traps are placed across the Black Hills National Forest in high-risk areas, such as campgrounds, rest areas, and recreation sites. Traps detected three spongy moths in 2022, and one detection confirmed in 2025 and 2023. These findings are consistent with APHIS and other partners' results.
- The Forest Health Program, in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy, developed and distributed 1,500 "Don't Move Firewood" posters to 500 campgrounds across the state, as well as four to six billboards primarily along the I-90 and I-29 corridors near the state border, and along state highway 18 in Hot Springs and Main Street in Watertown.
- Every year through our partnership with South Dakota State University Extension, DANR publishes a Forest Health Highlight Report and Pest Bulletins of common tree pathogens and insects in South Dakota. These publications are reviewed for consistency and compliance with the National Invasive Species Management Plan.

Cooperative Forestry & Agroforestry Assistance

- We contracted with the Timmons Group to develop an accomplishment reporting geodatabase to efficiently track technical assists and to use as a planning tool to help with landscape level management.

Fire

- In every year from 2022-2025 we have successfully hosted, assisted, or coordinated three statewide academies with one being held in Pierre, Tea, and Rapid City. Each academy hosted at least three National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) courses targeted towards new and mid-level leadership firefighters. Student numbers ranged from 50-150 for each academy and agencies represented included federal and state agencies, and local volunteer fire departments. Along with the three wildland fire academies hosted each year, standalone fire courses were hosted as needed, typically totaling in over a dozen more classes offered.
- South Dakota Wildland Fire (SDWF) Division hosts annual Wildfire Awareness Month events in the cities of Hot Springs and Custer to engage and educate the public on wildfire prevention. Wildland Fire also staffed educational booths at two spring fever events per year held by the Master Gardeners and numerous workshops targeted at homeowner associations and road districts.
- Assist with prescribed fires as requested from private landowners and state lands.
- The Wildland Fire Division provides equipment through Federal Excess Personal Property (FEPP) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) to rural fire departments. Currently 52 departments have FEPP agreement with South Dakota Wildland Fire (SDWF). From 2021 to 2025 there has been 597 VFA grant applications for equipment and supplies from fire departments that have been approved by SDWF. From 2021 to 2025 we have certified at least 20 volunteer fire department task books in entry level and mid-level positions including single resource boss and squad boss. Each year we also initiate more than 50 task books showing growth and commitment of the volunteer fire department's for increased capabilities and leadership in wildland firefighting.

Urban and Community Forestry

- Assisted approximately 123 communities with street tree inventories since 2020.
 - 2020 (3) – Edgemont (partial), Piedmont (partial), and Summerset (partial).
 - 2021 (2) – Dakota Dunes, Edgemont (partial)
 - 2022 (8) – Box Elder, Edgemont (partial), Philip, Kadoka (partial), Capitol Complex in Pierre, State Fairgrounds in Huron, Sisseton, and Carthage
 - 2023 (21) – Marion, Colton, Crooks, Renner, Mitchell Parks, Montrose, Monroe, Canistota, Humboldt, Plankinton, Centerville, Chancellor, Parker, Valley Springs, Springfield, Alcester, Gayville, Viborg, Belle Fourche, Kadoka, and Murdo.

- 2024 (64) – Golf Course in Avon, Alexandria, Madison, Wentworth, Colman, Ramona, Lake Preston, Arlington, Flandreau, Elkton, Aurora, Bruce, White, Astoria, Toronto, Estelline, Hayti, Lake Norden, Castlewood, Badger, Willow Lake, Doland, Frankfort, Bradley, Florence, Ashton, Brentford, Mellette, Stratford, Conde, Bath, Warner, Bristol, Frederick, Columbia, Veblen, New Effington, Rosholt, Peever, Ortley, South Shore, Goodwin, Revillo, Stockholm, Warner, Newell, Whitewood, Fruitdale, White Owl, Union Center, Piedmont (partial), Hill City, Keystone, Hermosa, Hot Springs, Wall, Wasta, Interior, Martin, White River, Wood, Lemmon (partial), and Hilgers Gulch in Pierre.
- 2025 (25) – Fort Pierre, Woonsocket, Leola, Milbank (Ash Inventory), Herreid, Blunt, Wessington Springs, Kimball, Dupree, Eureka, Pierre (Ash Inventory), Mobridge, Pukwana, Oacoma, Reliance, Presho, Wessington, Miller, Faulkton, Onida, McLaughlin, Pollock, Glenham, Selby, and Langford.

Forest Legacy

The Big Sioux River Forest project is a fee acquisition of the largest (215-acre) forested parcel in Lincoln County. Situated in an agricultural crop monoculture (81% of land use) this former Boy Scout camp and its oak dominated upland forest adjacent to the Big Sioux River is part of a narrow strip of rolling forested hills extending along the state's eastern border. The property is part of the green ribbon of biologically rich, scenic, and climate resilient forest hugging the meandering river. At the crossroads of three states, two major interstate highways, and within 30 miles of the fastest growing and largest city in South Dakota the project will connect Newton Hills State Park to Johnson and McKee Game Production Areas (GPA) forming a 1,970-acre continuous block of conserved lands. 4% of the entire State and only 1.5% of land area in Lincoln County is forested. This forestland is threatened by residential development from skyrocketing population growth driven by a strong regional economy. The Conservation Fund purchased the property in late 2021 before it could be sold for development.

Enhance Public Benefits from Trees and Forests

Forest Stewardship

- DANR completed one Best Management Practices (BMP) audit in 2024 and has facilitated activities through appropriate partners to apply the 319 grant to implement BMP activities. DANR hosted two educational workshops on the importance of riparian buffers and proper implementation techniques in 2024. DANR also participates in the annual Logger's Education meeting, hosted by the

Black Hills Forest Resource Association aimed to provide continuing education to the timber products industry in the Black Hills.

- DANR provided comments on 31 national and local forest projects aimed at improving the proposed actions to better meet the needs of South Dakota

Forest Health

- DANR manage subawards of the Forest Health Invasive Plant Program to County Weed and Pest boards, treating approximately 1,500 acres annually on private lands adjacent to National Forests and Grasslands.
- DANR participates in the Great Plains Tree Pest Council.

Cooperative Forestry Assistance

- DANR is a Cooperating Agency for the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Revision.
- DANR has facilitated 200 windbreak renovations since 2018

Fire

- Fuels have been reduced through fuel mitigation programs on an average of 735 acres per year, on state and private lands, to create or enhance survivable space and/or to create landscape-scale fuel breaks.
- Informational brochures have been distributed to educate the public on fuel mitigation through a combination of landowner workshops and face-to-face landowner meetings. Rehabilitation of a Firewise Garden Demonstration Site is 75% complete. This demonstration site is designed to engage and provide wildfire awareness and resiliency information to the whole family.
- South Dakota Wildland Fire Division assisted Pennington and Lawrence counties in updating their Community Wildland Fire Protection Plans (CWPP) in 2024. Custer county is currently revising their CWPP.

Urban and Community Forestry

- The Urban and Community Forestry program awarded 51 communities funding for tree plantings.
- Forestry staff developed two productive food forest demonstration sites, in Spearfish (2023) and Howard (2024), and revitalized the food forest in Pierre (2025).
- Staff worked with Rapid City (2025), Edgemont (2023) and Kadoka (2023) to develop community forestry plans.

Implementation Challenges

Five overarching categories of challenges were identified during the review process:

1. Funding Instability & Financial Constraints
2. Workforce Capacity & Staffing Limitations
3. Coordination and Governance Barriers
4. Stakeholder Engagement & Public Participation Challenges
5. Operation, Environmental and Administrative Constraints

Funding Instability & Financial Constraints

- Inconsistent, competitive and declining funding has limited long-term planning and program stability.
- Increased responsibilities without proportional funding, plus contractor and technology costs strain implementation capacity.

Workforce Capacity & Staffing Limitations

- DANR staff shortages, turnover and limited technical capacity reduce program continuity and effectiveness.
- Communities and partners are often understaffed limiting their ability to participate and deliver on shared goals and objectives.

Coordination and Governance Barriers

- Interagency coordination challenges, infrequent committee meetings, and inconsistent federal and state guidance hinder collaboration.
- Agreement structures and administrative processes create friction among partners (e.g. Forest Inventory & Analysis).

Stakeholder Engagement & Public Participation Challenges

- Limited comment opportunities, low community engagement, and inconsistent partner participation reduce program effectiveness.
- Industry, tribal partners and local stakeholders show variable interest or face participation barriers.

Operation, Environmental and Administrative Constraints

- Weather variability, wildfire response demands, and public perception of prescribed fire affect implementation, timing and outcomes.
- Reporting burdens, approval delays and process inefficiencies limit program agility.
- Loss of small sawmill and forest products infrastructure.

Implementation Focus of the Next Five Years

- Maintain participation in the NRCS technical committee and attend quarterly meetings.
- Assist landowners each year to aid them with their forest management and forest health goals and objectives.
- Use and develop the Good Neighbor Authority program to implement landscape-scale projects, improve forest health and resiliency and maintain support for the existing forest products industry.
- Develop a document identifying barriers to biomass utilization from trees outside of forests.
- Coordinate with tribes and municipalities to facilitate landowner workshops and education outreach.
- Convene the Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee annually.
- Collect and distribute information on grazing methods that are not detrimental to riparian areas, bottomland forests and upland hardwoods.
- Continue to assist communities with their planting and inventory needs so they can better respond to current and emerging threats, such as EAB.