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California Releases First Statewide Interagency Strategy to Restore Forests After Wildfire

What you need to know: The new strategy provides a shared roadmap to accelerate reforestation across public and private lands-- as millions of acres of burned forestland remain at risk and nearly half of California's forests could be lost by 2071 without action.

Visalia, California — On October 21, 2026, The California Wildfire and Forest Resilience Task Force released the state's first statewide interagency reforestation strategy, establishing a shared roadmap to accelerate forest recovery after severe wildfire to mitigate the growing risk of permanent forest loss. Millions of acres of burned forestland remain at risk of failing to regenerate naturally, a challenge no single agency or landowner can address alone. *California's Reforestation Strategy: An All-Lands Approach to Restoring Forests After Severe Wildfire* calls for coordinated action across public and private lands, bringing agencies and partners together to expand reforestation over the next decade. Developed by the USDA California Climate Hub, with support from CAL FIRE, the USDA Forest Service and American Forests, the Strategy provides a framework to accelerate reforestation, expand planting capacity and help prevent the loss of millions of acres of California forestland.

California's Forests Face a Growing Recovery Crisis

From 2012 to 2024, approximately 4.4 million acres burned at high severity in California. As wildfires burn hotter and burn more area, vast areas of forest are failing to regenerate naturally. Statewide, only about 14% of forested acres that burned at high severity since 2020 that need treatment have been reforested, leaving at least 1.3 million acres of severely burned forestland at risk of repeat high-severity wildfire and potential conversion to shrublands or grasslands. A [2025 CAL FIRE and American Forests report](#) warns that nearly half of California's forests could be lost by 2071 without a major expansion of fuel reduction and reforestation efforts.



“We have a narrow window to get this work moving at the scale California needs,” said **Steven Ostoja, Ph.D., USDA California Climate Hub Director**. “Getting this Strategy—and the data behind it—into the hands of the people that plan and implement reforestation is imperative to recover and restore forest cover for generations to come.”

When it comes to reforestation, timing matters. Reforestation is generally most cost-effective when planning begins in the first few years after a wildfire. Timely access to data, funding, regulatory pathways, planting materials and field capacity is therefore critical to restoring forests before additional fires and changing conditions make recovery more difficult.

A Roadmap to Scale Reforestation

High-severity wildfires since 2000 have created a need to reforest more than 2.3 million acres. While more than 254,000 acres have been reforested since 2020, the pace of restoration remains far below the scale of need.

The Strategy identifies four priorities for closing California’s reforestation gap:

- **Accelerate reforestation planning** by improving access to data, identifying priority areas and beginning planning earlier after wildfire.
- **Expand the supply of seeds and seedlings** by strengthening seed collection, seed banks, nurseries and other sources of high-quality planting materials.
- **Build capacity to implement restoration** by strengthening the workforce, infrastructure and partnerships needed to prepare sites, plant seedlings and monitor results.
- **Advance climate-informed reforestation** by accounting for changing environmental conditions and helping land managers select appropriate species, planting densities and restoration approaches.

Together, these priorities are intended to move reforestation beyond a project-by-project response toward a coordinated, landscape-scale system. The Strategy calls for better post-fire planning data across land ownerships, stronger coordination among land managers, expanded planting-material supplies and workforce capacity, and greater use of climate-informed practices.

Because wildfires cross jurisdictional boundaries, effective recovery requires agencies, tribes, private landowners and regional partners to coordinate priorities and investments across entire landscapes. Shared data and planning can help identify where reforestation is needed most, direct limited resources to priority areas and align the capacity to collect seed, grow seedlings, prepare sites and plant trees.



"California is losing forestland, and we're not replanting fast enough to keep up," said **Stewart McMorrow, Staff Chief of CAL FIRE's Reforestation Services Program**. "We need to treat reforestation like the emergency it is. That means prioritizing collecting more seed, growing more seedlings and building the capacity in the entire reforestation pipeline to get more trees growing where we have lost forestland."

California has already begun building that capacity. Cone deposits to public seed banks increased 275% in 2024 compared with 2023, and statewide conifer seedling production capacity reached approximately 41 million seedlings annually in 2025, nearly 50% higher than in 2020. The California Cone Corps has also placed more than 40 trained members in positions supporting seed collection, seedling production, site preparation, planting and monitoring.

Building on Years of Collaborative Progress

The Strategy builds on years of collaboration among state and federal agencies, researchers and conservation partners to identify barriers to reforestation and strengthen the systems needed to restore forests after severe wildfire.

Starting in 2022, the Task Force's reforestation working group brought together federal and state agencies, researchers and conservation partners to identify barriers to scaling reforestation. Its 2023 assessment of California's reforestation pipeline helped identify critical gaps in seed and other planting materials and informed subsequent programs and strategies.

That collaboration helped lay the groundwork for the [California Reforestation Pipeline Partnership](#), a collaboration among the USDA Forest Service, CAL FIRE and American Forests focused on strengthening the full pipeline—from seed collection and nursery production to planting and long-term restoration. The Strategy builds on this work by identifying the investments, coordination and capacity needed to expand reforestation across public and private lands.

"Restoring California's forests after more than a decade of unprecedented wildfire requires action at a massive scale, and American Forests is proud to support the Task Force and contribute to the California Reforestation Strategy," **said Hilary Franz, President & CEO of American Forests**. "We need bold action to build long-term wildfire resilience in California, and this plan builds on years of collaborative efforts and science to protect our communities and forests."



Building on this Strategy to Address Recovery Across All Landscapes

While this Strategy focuses on reforestation, California's post-fire recovery needs extend beyond forested landscapes. Repeated fires have affected vast areas of shrublands, and in some places these ecosystems have converted to nonnative annual grasses that can burn more frequently, increasing future fire risk and making ecological recovery more difficult.

The Reforestation Strategy will help guide implementation of the Task Force's forthcoming 2026 Wildfire and Landscape Resilience Action Plan, integrating forest recovery into California's broader approach to landscape resilience, regional action and long-term ecosystem health. The Action Plan will address these broader needs through key actions that include post-fire restoration in chaparral and shrublands, identifying effective, strategic and climate-informed restoration that can help recover healthy vegetation, sustain ecosystem services, provide opportunities to expand tribal stewardship and reduce the risk of further landscape degradation.

California has the knowledge, partnerships and growing capacity to make meaningful progress. The challenge now is to scale up that work—coordinating across boundaries, using shared data to prioritize investments, expanding the supply of seeds and seedlings, and accelerating restoration while there is still time to help forests recover.

[Read California's Reforestation Strategy](#)

