



## A LANDOWNER'S GUIDE TO FOREST CARE

Thank you for participating in Forest Care! If you have any questions during the process please contact Forest Care and we will do our best to answer them. This guide is intended to provide the participating landowner with an overview of Forest Care and what they can expect to happen throughout the process.

### Introduction

Forest Care is an exciting new program that helps landowners reduce the number of small-diameter trees on their property by using matching funds to reimburse the expense of tree removal. Live trees and shrubs less than 12 inches in diameter qualify for removal. Thinning these trees will help forests return to a more natural density and species composition. Dead and large tree removals are not eligible for reimbursement under the Forest Care program. The goal of Forest Care is to help create a forest that is more resilient to drought, insects, and disease, while increasing fire safety.

Historically, Southern California forests experienced light periodic fire. These fires created forests with more open stands of large conifers and scattered patchy areas of shrubs and small trees. As communities grew in the San Bernardino National Forest, fire suppression increased in order to protect businesses, individuals and homes. The result was a forest with a high density of small trees and shrubs that would have otherwise been naturally thinned. With such a high density of ladder fuels, or flammable materials that allow fire to climb to the top of the forest, much of the San Bernardino National Forest is at high risk of another catastrophic fire. Overcrowding of small live trees also causes high competition for water, thus creating dry, stressed-out trees that are more vulnerable to drought, insect attack, disease outbreak, and fire.

In the wake of the fires of 2003, successful fuels reduction projects have been implemented to reduce fire risk and improve forest health on federal and state lands. In fact, since 2004, the Forest Service has treated over 20,000 acres of forest with various fuels reduction treatments. All of this work was completed on public land. Privately owned parcels adjacent to and within these stands also require thinning prescriptions to improve the health of the overall resource. Forest Care is designed to help with the initial costs of treating privately owned lands following the basic principles of managing forest resources and protecting communities from catastrophic wildfire.

### Program Overview

**Type of program:** Forest Care is a cost-share program that reimburses a portion of the total costs of the forest treatment. The landowner pays the remainder of the cost. We hope this investment will encourage the landowner to maintain the conditions into the future.

**Financial Incentive:** Forest Care sends a professional forester to consult with the landowner, evaluate the property, and mark the trees to be removed. The cost of removal of the marked hazardous fuels will be reimbursed up to 75% or a cap. The remaining 25% of the removal costs will be paid by the landowner. The cap rates were developed from known rates of local contractors and are site specific according to the tree density, size, slope and accessibility of the property.

**Eligibility:** The property must be 5 acres or less in size, located in or around the San Bernardino National Forest, and have over 200 trees per acre.

**Process:** After property owners contact Forest Care and the property is verified as being eligible, a professional forester will meet with the property owner to inspect the site and design the treatment plan. At this meeting, the landowner will sign a contract enrolling them in the program. The property owner is then responsible for completing the work to the specified standards within 60 days of signing the contract. The work may be completed either by a licensed contractor or the landowner. Reimbursement will not be made for landowner labor or any labor other than that performed by a licensed contractor. Forest Care will provide the landowner with a courtesy list of licensed contractors in the area (see tip sheet for reference).

Once the landowner completes the work and submits invoices, Forest Care will verify the work meets the program standards. The landowner will then be reimbursed for up to 75% of costs incurred or the maximum cap. Costs will be calculated from receipts for work performed by a licensed contractor, rental of equipment, or equipment used and valued at a fair market rental rate. The entire process can take anywhere from two to six months, depending on how quickly the landowner completes the work.

**Standards:** You are required to follow the specific Forest Care plan designed for your property. Only the removal of trees less than 12 inches in diameter, brush and slash are eligible for reimbursement from Forest Care. Costs of removing dead trees or trees larger than 12" in diameter are not covered under this program. Forest Care uses the following minimum criteria for creating a healthy and fire safe forest.

Trees less than 12 inches in diameter will be thinned to 15 feet from adjacent larger trees to prevent a laddering effect. Since Forest Care promotes forest health, thinning will be done to retain a mixed age class, mixed species composition, and the healthiest, best-looking trees. Brush will also be removed or thinned back when it is considered a ladder fuel. By removing the ladder fuels, larger trees are more protected and fire behavior may return to the more natural small, light burning conditions.

Pruning may also be necessary to create a healthier and safer forest. This work will also be reimbursed through Forest Care. Any residual tree will be pruned so that branches hang no lower than 8 feet above the ground on the uphill side. However, trees will not be pruned higher than 1/2 of their total height. For more information on the pruning standards visit the International Society of Arboriculture's website ([www.treesaregood.com](http://www.treesaregood.com)), and look up Pruning Mature Trees, and Pruning Newly Planted Trees.

Thinning within 100 feet of a permitted structure is designed to meet all state and local defensible space/hazardous fuels ordinances. All work on your property will comply with the California Forest Practice Rules (see hand out), and with all state and local regulations. Licensed contractors know to follow the regulations. However, we have enclosed a summary of important soil erosion and fire safety regulations for the property owner to follow if they elect to do their own work.

## Definitions

**Diameter** or diameter at breast height (DBH) is the linear width measurement in inches through the tree at 4.5 feet above the ground.

**Thinning** is the removal of small trees and shrubs to reduce the number, continuity and density of fuels within a forest. Other benefits to thinning include preventing tree mortality from high competition, improving the condition of uncut trees, and restoring historic species composition.

**Ground fire** is a light and low fire that mainly impacts the forest floor. This is usually a slow-moving fire that naturally thins out the understory of the forest, reduces duff, and does not usually reach the tops of large trees. Ground fire is very important in Southern California forest ecosystems because many species depend on this type of disturbance to create the necessary habitat conditions for them to thrive.

**Crown fire (canopy fire)** is a large, hot wildfire that can destroy homes and large areas of wildland. These fires are often caused by ground fires using the fuel ladder to reach into the canopy (tree-tops). Also called catastrophic fires, these fires may also claim human lives, especially in the wildland-urban interface or intermix (WUI).

**Shrubs and brush** include species such as manzanita, scrub oak, and juniper. They are usually woody plants with multiple stems, rather than trees which have one large trunk. Shrubs are a natural component of our native forests. However, high densities can act as ladder fuels.

**Ladder fuel** is vegetation that grows underneath taller trees and serves as a "ladder" for fire to climb from the forest floor to the tree tops.

**200 trees per acre** is the minimum tree density requirement for a landowner to qualify for Forest Care. On a 1/10 acre lot, that would equal 20 trees.

**Stand composition** refers to the species diversity and structure within a forest. Optimal stand composition differs for different forest types and across sites within a single forest type. The foresters with Forest Care will thin to create the most natural stand composition for the location and site conditions on each property.

**Treatment plan** is the plan that the professional forester creates for a specific property, indicating which trees need to be removed, which trees need to be pruned, which areas need to be left alone, and any other specific requirements for creating a healthy Forest Care forest.

**Fire regime** is a classification of the natural fire patterns on a landscape in the absence of human land management. The fire regime usually indicates how frequently and intensely the local wildlands burned. Historic Native American management fires are also included in the natural fire regime of an area.

**Wildland-urban interface and intermix WUI** are terms used for communities existing next to and within wildland areas. Mountain communities such as Crestline, Lake Arrowhead, Wrightwood, Lytle Creek, Big Bear, and Idyllwild are all considered "wildland-urban intermix" communities because the wildland is continuous and over 50% of it is vegetated. San Bernardino, Highland, and Del Rosa are considered a "wildland-urban interface" because the development is contiguous along the wildland. However, the wildland is not continuous within the development.