



GROWING FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

2023 Annual Report

A close-up photograph of a large pile of acorns. The acorns are of various sizes and colors, ranging from light tan to dark brown, with some showing distinct reddish-brown streaks or spots. They are piled together, creating a textured background. A semi-transparent dark rectangular box is centered over the image, containing white text.

**Sustaining and enhancing natural
resources and communities through
forestry and wildland fire management**

FROM THE STATE FORESTER

Friends and Partners,

This year brought opportunities and challenges for our agency as we continue to address the needs of Kansans. Our work would not be possible without the support of our partner agencies, legislators, and Kansans who continue to support our work in forestry and wildland fire.

An opportunity this year will be the upgrade of our shadehouse with funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. We will also add efficiency and capacity enhancements for collecting and storing bulk tree seed for direct seeding reforestation projects.

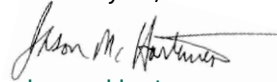
Invasives like Callery pear are a continual challenge as we, along with our partners, expanded the 2023 Callery pear buy-back program. While the expansion of the program garnered new awareness of the issue, we have a long road ahead as we work to manage this escaped ornamental tree.

A great success for the Kansas Forest Service was the release of the Kansas Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal. This portal is a tool for Kansas communities to locate areas at high risk for wildfire and to concentrate mitigation efforts, prevention measures, and funding in those areas.

As K-State plans to be the next-generation land-grant university, the Kansas Forest Service has an eye on making our own upgrades, starting with a remodel of our state office to add workspaces for our growing programs. We look forward to being part of the university's mission to serve and connect with Kansans in innovative ways.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our programs and organization.

Thank you,



Jason Hartman
State Forester



WATER

Healthy forests lead to healthy streams. The Kansas Forest Service is in the business of assisting landowners to conserve and restore the state's streamside forests. New streamside forest plantings, or buffers, act like a shock absorber against the pulses of polluted and erosive water following heavy rains. Where streamside forests have been degraded, streams suffer. Where streamside forests are healthy, streams are less polluted and have improved water quality and calmer currents.

Foresters assist landowners with protecting, stabilizing, and restoring the important riparian forests along streams and rivers that limit erosion, keep water clean, and provide valuable habitat for wildlife.

In these critical streamside forests, the Forest Health Program is working with landowners to eradicate invasive plants and tree-killing pests and pathogens. Callery pear, bush honeysuckle, and other invasive plants continue to infest new areas throughout the state. Foresters continue to monitor and mitigate these invasive plants.

- ▶ **44,092 tons of sediment** kept from entering John Redmond, Perry, and Tuttle Creek reservoirs by eight streambank stabilization projects.
- ▶ More than **362,000 native tree seeds planted** in riparian forest areas.
- ▶ Callery pear has been detected in **60 counties** across the eastern two thirds of the state.
- ▶ Conducted a successful Callery pear awareness campaign that consisted of outreach, education, media appearances, and in-person training. Windshield surveys were conducted in **five counties** during the spring.
- ▶ A northeast Kansas prairie restoration pilot project was conducted to **eradicate 5 acres** of Callery pear.

Photo: The streamside forests of Kansas are some of the state's greatest natural resources. Streamside forests (also known as riparian forests) play an important role statewide, as they act to protect water quality for more than 134,400 miles of streams, creeks, and rivers.







QUALITY OF LIFE

Trees improve Kansans' quality of life. Gardens, parks, and other managed green spaces have a positive effect on public wellbeing and health. Trees cool city streets, clean the air, reduce crime, and increase property values and business traffic. Windbreaks, shelterbelts, and riparian plantings benefit the quality of life for Kansans by improving home energy savings, increasing crop yields, and slowing erosion and sedimentation of reservoirs.

The Community Forestry Program has continued to position itself to boost Kansans' quality of life. With newly secured grant funding, the program plans to increase the health of the state's community forests. Foresters continue to provide support to their communities through tree boards and municipal employees. Additional funding will be allocated to communities through federally funded cost-share programs for tree planting, pruning, and removal of hazardous trees.

- ▶ **88 Tree City USA** communities in Kansas.
- ▶ **68.39% of Kansans** live in a Tree City USA community.
- ▶ **9 Kansas college** campuses were recognized as Tree Campus USA communities.
- ▶ **\$19,686,105 spent** managing the forestry resources by Kansas Tree City USA communities.
- ▶ **6,473 trees** planted in Kansas Tree City USA communities last year.
- ▶ **225 technical assistance requests** fulfilled by community foresters, including 32 community tree inventories or tree canopy studies.

Photo: Forest Health Coordinator Ryan Rastok explains the merits of native tree species at the 2023 Callery pear buy-back program in Topeka, Kansas.



FIRE

The Kansas Forest Service Fire Management Program helps local fire departments through training, equipment, and financial assistance. The Kansas Forest Service also deploys personnel in support of national wildland fire fighting efforts.

The Fire Management Program had a busy year with training, prescribed fires, and wildland fire response and assistance. The program applied for community wildfire defense grants for three counties to help develop community wildfire protection plans. Additionally, the Kansas Forest Service was able to add two additional aviation contractors to assist local departments with fire suppression efforts.

In 2023, the Kansas Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal was launched as tool for fire departments, community planners, and landowners to better understand their wildfire risk. The development of this tool is based on a decade of Kansas wildfire occurrence data. Communities can use the portal as a planning and resiliency tool to reduce the overall effects of wildfire.

- ▶ **1,643 students trained** in fire suppression, prescribed burning, incident management, and fire prevention and mitigation.
- ▶ **\$624,400** worth of equipment was issued to assist Kansas fire districts.
- ▶ **114 individuals** have registered for Advanced User accounts through the Kansas Wildfire Risk Assessment Portal in the first 30 days of its launch.
- ▶ **8 aircraft** were deployed on 34 missions for wildland fire suppression. Aircraft were prepositioned for elevated weather concerns another 40 times.



Learn more at
kansaswildfirerisk.org

Photo: Hutchison County Community College students listen to the day's directions at the 2023 Mitigation Project. The project took place at Historic Lake Scott and is critical for reducing wildland fire danger in the park.







SUSTAINABILITY

The Kansas Forest Service supports healthy prairie and woodland ecosystems. Through prescribed burning and forest management, the spread of invasive and undesirable vegetation is abated, improving wildlife habitat and landowner satisfaction. Kansas ecosystem restoration is vital not only to native plants and wildlife, but also to the Kansas economy that depends on healthy ecosystems.

Spring and fall Conservation Seedling Program participation remains high. Increasing production capacity, improving seedling quality, and continuing to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction have been focal points at the seedling nursery.

The Forest Health Program surveyed, detected and mitigated forest health issues in collaboration with state, federal, municipal, community, private, and non-profit partners. Emerald ash borer continues to be an expanding threat to native ash trees, degrading ecosystems and presenting elevated risk and significant economic burden on communities.

- ▶ **275,064 seedlings and 21,200 seeds distributed** for conservation plantings.
- ▶ **13 counties** have detectable populations of emerald ash borer with one county added in 2023.
- ▶ **15 additional counties** are suspected to have emerald ash borer and are currently monitored via trap trees.
- ▶ **214 pollinator bundles**, comprised of 6,080 seedlings, were distributed through the conservation tree program. Pollinator bundles are composed of native tree and shrub species, and provide habitat for insect and bird species.

Photo: Northwest District Forester Christopher Hanson monitors K-State students as they learn how to conduct a prescribed burn as part of their wildlife and outdoor enterprise management course.



DEVELOPING STEWARDS

The Kansas Forest Service supports landowners, students, and communities in their conservation efforts. The annual Arbor Day Poster Contest, Smokey Bear events, field days, and workshops, support the protection of Kansas natural resources and help individuals and communities meet the goals for their property.

The Rural Forestry Program provided technical assistance to landowners across the state. Foresters also provided management plans for landowners enrolled in NRCS conservation programs, writing 91 windbreak establishment and renovation plans, 50 streamside forest buffer plans, 44 tree and shrub establishment plans, and 114 forest stand improvement plans. These plans, and more than 200 other technical assists provided to landowners, helped bring more than \$250,000 in necessary financial assistance for implementing these conservation practices.

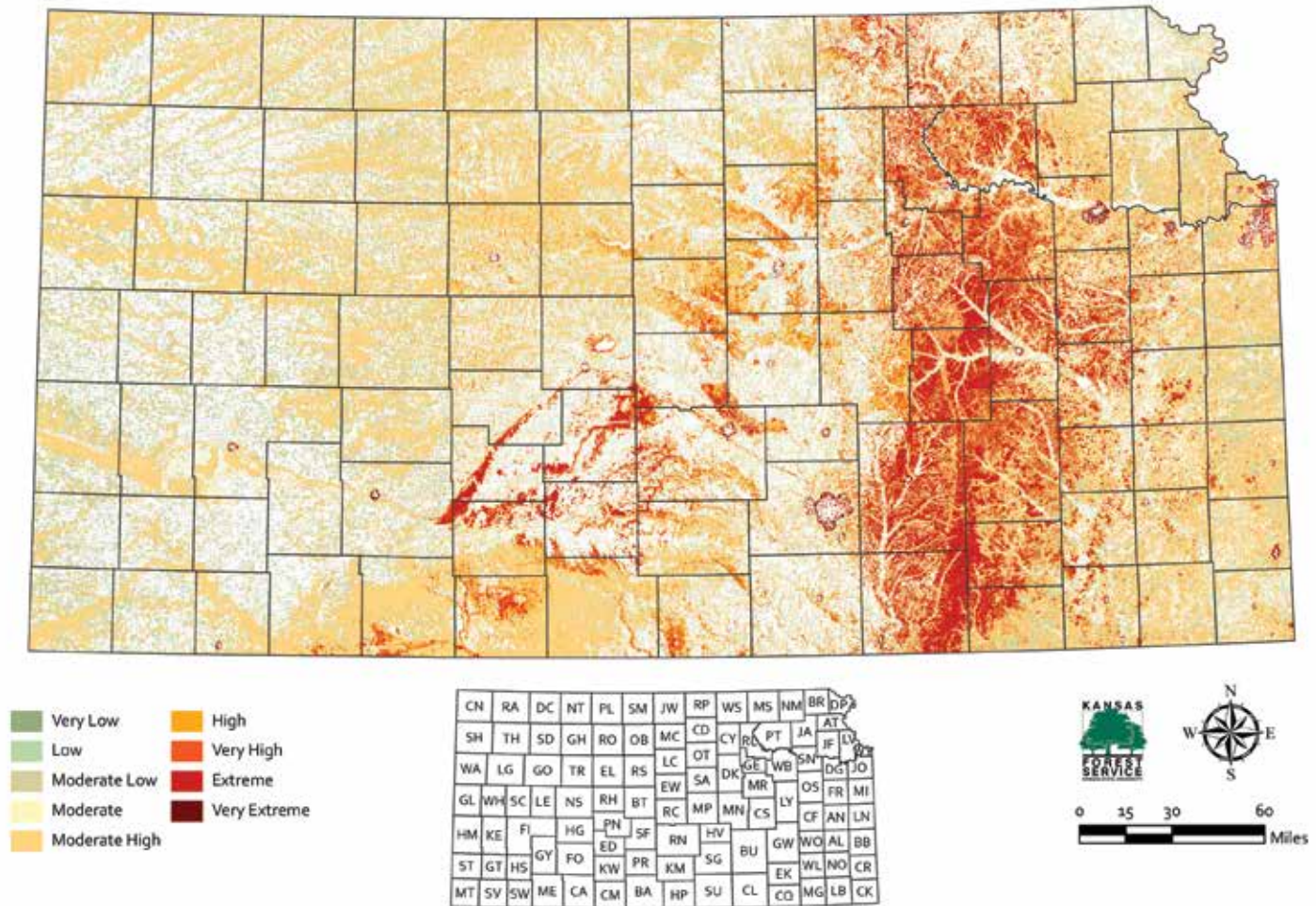
The Utilization and Marketing Program maintains a publicly available listing of 50 timber buyers and 48 sawmills in Kansas. The timber industry provides valuable services to landowners and natural resource managers.

- ▶ **427,000 pounds** of black walnuts were processed at six Kansas hulling stations. These hulling stations bring money into local economies while reducing the number of black walnuts sent to landfills or otherwise underutilized.
- ▶ **94 windbreaks** were established or renovated, stretching more than 25 miles and protecting at least **800 acres** of productive agricultural land.
- ▶ **411 technical assistance requests** were fulfilled by rural foresters.
- ▶ **66 Forest Stewardship plans** were created by Rural District Foresters to help landowners manage **10,650 woodland acres**.

Photo: Charlotte Cooper sits on a pile of walnuts she collected with her family and brought to a walnut hulling station to be processed.



WILDLAND FIRE RISK INDEX

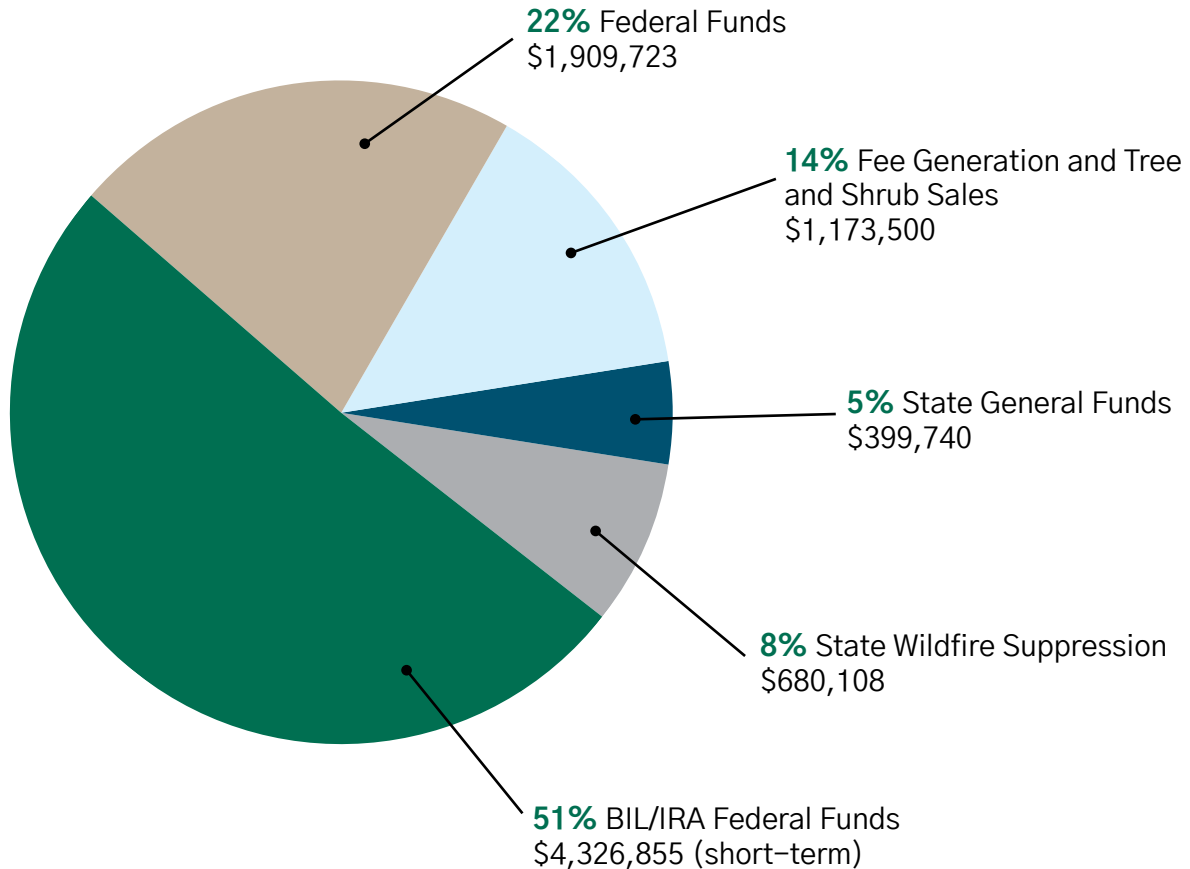


This map and others are available to the public at kansaswildfirerisk.org.



FUNDING

FISCAL YEAR 2023 BUDGET \$8,489,926





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**Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station
and Cooperative Extension Service**

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