



United States Department of Agriculture

## JOINT CHIEFS' LANDSCAPE RESTORATION PARTNERSHIP

# Upper North Fork Project



IDAHO



Salmon-Challis National Forest, USDA Forest Service photo

The Salmon-Challis National Forest covers 4.3 million acres of land across east-central Idaho. Stunning rock outcrops, including Idaho's tallest peak, emerge from dense forests of ponderosa pine. This area sees little rainfall, so when storms roll in, they are often dry but full of lightning, and fires can spark in an instant. Small communities around the scenic Upper North Fork section of the forest are popular to retirees and recreation enthusiasts. The rugged terrain and wild rivers found here are ideal for a range of activities, from hunting and hiking to rock-climbing and white-water rafting. Fire has been suppressed for decades to protect people and property. That well-intentioned practice has left the forest and surrounding private lands that are loaded with dense and dead plant material, making fire inevitable, and adding more to burn. This Joint Chiefs' project helped grow relationships to build long-term awareness and action to keep people safe and support the natural systems that draw people to this beautiful part of the country.

### PROJECT IMPACT

**\$186,000  
INVESTED**

Total awarded from the Joint Chiefs' from 2015-2017: \$2.58 million

To protect residents, Lemhi County invested \$186,000 to thin dense timber and remove material that could fuel wildfires.

USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service are working together to improve the health of forests where public forests and grasslands connect to privately owned lands. Through the Joint Chiefs' Landscape Restoration Partnership, the two USDA agencies are restoring landscapes by reducing wildfire threats to communities and landowners, protecting water quality and enhancing wildlife habitat.

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## Upper North Fork Project RESULTS



Salmon-Challis National Forest, USDA Forest Service Photo



**Reduced wildfire threats to communities and landowners:** More than 23 acres of private land and 3,867 acres of public land were treated to reduce hazardous fuels.



**Protected water quality:** High severity wildfires consume vegetation down to their roots, which increases water runoff and the likelihood of landslides. Because of this, wildfires pose great risk to wildlife and fish habitat, and community infrastructure long after the flames are gone. By removing excess timber and other fuels, this project reduced that risk and helped to keep soils in place, benefiting life and water quality throughout the watershed.

**Enhanced wildlife habitat:** The native vegetation is adapted to fire, but high intensity wildfires kill grasses and forbs that are food for native animals, including deer and elk. This causes animals to become easy prey for predators like bears and wolves, which impacts their population. That's why this project created conditions for healthy fire, to help return balance to their ecosystem.



## UPPER NORTH FORK PROJECT



Dani Mazzotta (center) collaborating with USFS and other partners © Idaho Conservation League

## Partnerships Help Protect Communities from Wildfires

The North Fork area of Idaho is a checkerboard of public and private lands with too much fuel to burn. Collaborating with partners is critical to achieving forest management goals because they all bring different perspectives of land management that must work in tandem to thoroughly address wildfire challenges across this landscape. The Joint Chiefs' project here was designed to help stakeholders collaborate to protect communities and important natural areas.

"When we are out there kicking dirt together, we get to know one another so that planning comes from a place of common understanding," said Dani Mazzotta, Central Idaho Director for the Idaho Conservation League, a respected state-wide organization that was instrumental in building trust among the many people involved in fire resiliency planning and implementation.

The Joint Chiefs' project offered technical expertise and funding to help private landowners make their property more resilient in the face of fire. Timber was thinned, and dead plant material was removed from private lands and the national forest, and a regimen of prescribed fire treatments began to reduce longer-term risk. "We appreciated that this project wasn't just about timber," Mazzotta said. "It was a holistic, cross-boundary forest health project that addressed many challenges."

"Treating fuels here is relatively inexpensive and it protects a vast area of public and private land," said Wade McPhetridge, a fire management specialist with the USDA Forest Service. "While it is a seemingly simple solution, making so much progress requires coordination. Relationships built during the Joint Chiefs' project are carrying forward, and more and more landowners and partners are getting involved."



Fire truck, USDA

### Key Partners

- Idaho Conservation League
- Idaho Fish & Game
- Idaho Department of Highways
- Lemhi County WUI
- Lemhi Forest Restoration Group
- The North Fork Rural Fire Dept.