



2024 Annual Report

Kansas Forests in Focus: Protecting, Educating, and Celebrating



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

FROM THE STATE FORESTER

Dear Friends and Partners,

As we reflect on the past year, we recognize both the achievements and challenges we've faced together in advancing forestry and wildland fire management in Kansas. Your unwavering support, along with the collaboration of our partner agencies and communities, has been instrumental in our progress.

This year, we celebrated Smokey Bear's 80th birthday with a vibrant summer reading program that engaged nearly 1,900 children across 28 libraries. Additionally, we hosted a captivating Smokey Bear painting exhibit featuring the works of Rudy Wendelin, whose artistry played a pivotal role in fire prevention awareness.

Our response to the significant wildfires in the Big Blue River Corridor demonstrated the strength of our teamwork. Thanks to the coordinated efforts of the Kansas Forest

Service and local fire departments, we successfully managed the challenges posed by these extensive fires, and we continue to enhance our preparedness for future events.

We also made strides in tackling invasive species, launching an awareness campaign for Callery pear that included education and training initiatives, as well as a successful prairie restoration project.

As we look forward to 2025, we are committed to fostering a resilient and sustainable forestry landscape in Kansas. Thank you for your continued support as we strive to serve our communities in innovative ways.

Sincerely,



Jason Hartman
State Forester,
Kansas Forest Service

Photo: Kansas Forest Service staff from across the state gathered in Manhattan, Kansas, for a 2024 spring staff meeting.



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, foresters work with landowners to eradicate invasive plant species.

Invasive species removal and community education are both critical to sustaining and enhancing riparian forests.

- ▶ **Planted 7,927 pounds** of native tree seed in the spring of 2024.
- ▶ **Received a \$300,000 competitive grant** to work on 55 streambank projects in the next three years, including implementation of 28,500 feet of riparian forest buffers. This project will prevent 1.1 million tons of sediment from flowing into reservoirs over 10 years, a value of \$5.2 million in avoided dredging costs.
- ▶ **Provided technical assistance on 80 acres** of bush honeysuckle treatment.
- ▶ **Callery pear buy-back events** provided more than 200 native trees to replace Callery pear that landowners removed from the landscape.

Photo: Tech team members Colton Farra and Ashleigh McMichael stop for a photo by a frozen creek while marking timber for a timber stand improvement project in Chautauqua County. Timber stand improvement practices enhance forest health by removing less desirable trees and promoting the growth of higher-quality trees. These practices benefit wildlife and may increase landowner profits.







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.

Photo: Fire protection specialist David Shroyer assists with removing hazardous trees in the aftermath of the 2024 Westmoreland tornado.

- ▶ **90 Tree City USA** communities in Kansas.
- ▶ **68.34% of Kansans** live in a Tree City USA community.
- ▶ **7 Kansas college** campuses were recognized as Tree Campus USA communities.
- ▶ **\$21,409,856 was spent** managing the forestry resources by Kansas Tree City USA communities.
- ▶ **7,698 trees** were planted in Kansas Tree City USA communities last year.
- ▶ Provided **\$20,500** in pass-through grant funding to three communities for removing hazardous trees.
- ▶ **Provided personnel to assist** in Westmoreland following a tornado. Qualified personnel cleared debris and opened critical roadways.



FIRE

The Kansas Forest Service Fire Management Program supports local fire departments through training, equipment, and financial assistance. The Kansas Forest Service also trains, certifies incident qualifications, and mobilizes personnel in support of national wildland fire fighting efforts.

Three community wildfire defense grants provided three counties with support to develop community wildfire protection plans.

Several Kansas Forest Service employees are members of National Complex Incident Management Teams. These teams respond to wildfires and natural disasters across the United States. Kansas firefighters deployed on national fire assignments gain experience, train with their teams, and assist with wildland fire suppression.

The Kansas Forest Service provides training and subject matter expertise in prescribed fire for land managers and partners. Staff helped establish two new prescribed burn associations.

- ▶ **1,884 students** were trained in fire suppression, prescribed burning, incident management, and fire prevention and mitigation.
- ▶ **5 prescribed fire workshops** were held across the state.
- ▶ **Distributed nearly \$600,000** worth of vehicles, safety equipment, and financial grants related to wildland fire suppression.
- ▶ **A non-National Guard helicopter** was used for the first time during a wildland fire for aerial reconnaissance and suppression operations.
- ▶ **89 Kansas fire departments** received incident management response training.

Photo: Mark Penner, fire protection specialist with the Kansas Forest Service, and Russel Stuke, emergency management director and fire chief with Riley County Emergency Management, discuss suppression strategies during the Burkland/Axelton fire in April 2024.







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.

Participation remains high for the spring and fall conservation seedling program. Increasing production capacity, improving seedling quality, and continuing to maintain a high level of customer satisfaction have been focal points at the seedling nursery.

Photo: K-State student and Kansas Forest Service student worker, Sarah Schrage, helps pack conservation seedlings for the fall sale.

- ▶ **266,045 seedlings and 20,000 seeds were distributed** for conservation plantings.
- ▶ **14 counties** have detectable populations of emerald ash borer with one county, Lyon County, added in 2024.
- ▶ **14 additional counties** are suspected to have emerald ash borer and are currently monitored via trap trees.
- ▶ **249 pollinator bundles**, comprised of 6,935 seedlings, were distributed through the conservation tree program. Pollinator bundles are made up of native tree and shrub species, and provide habitat for insect and bird species.
- ▶ **6 community tree inventories** were completed in Beloit, Ottawa, Valley Falls, Alta Vista, Abilene, and Lindsborg.



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 92 windbreak establishment and renovation plans, 22 streamside forest buffer plans, 35 tree and shrub establishment plans, and 138 forest stand improvement plans. These plans, and more than 230 other technical assists provided to landowners, helped bring more than \$440,000 in necessary financial assistance for implementing these conservation practices.

The Utilization and Marketing Program maintains a publicly available listing of 57 timber buyers and 50 sawmills in Kansas. The timber industry provides valuable services to landowners and natural resource managers.

- ▶ **295,589 pounds** of black walnuts were processed at six Kansas hulling stations. These hulling stations, operated by Hammons Black Walnuts, bring money into local economies while reducing the number of black walnuts sent to landfills or otherwise underused.
- ▶ **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 answered by rural foresters who helped landowners plan and work toward creating sustainable forests on their land.
- ▶ **66 Forest Stewardship plans** were created by Rural District Foresters to help landowners manage **10,650 woodland acres**.

Photo: Firefighters in Riley County cut line as part of their Red Card Field Day with Northeast District Fire Management Officer Bryce Haverkamp.





Educational training is a vital role of the Kansas Forest Service. Training is offered in environmental stewardship, community development, and fire preparedness and prevention.



FUNDING

FISCAL YEAR 2024 BUDGET \$8,358,242

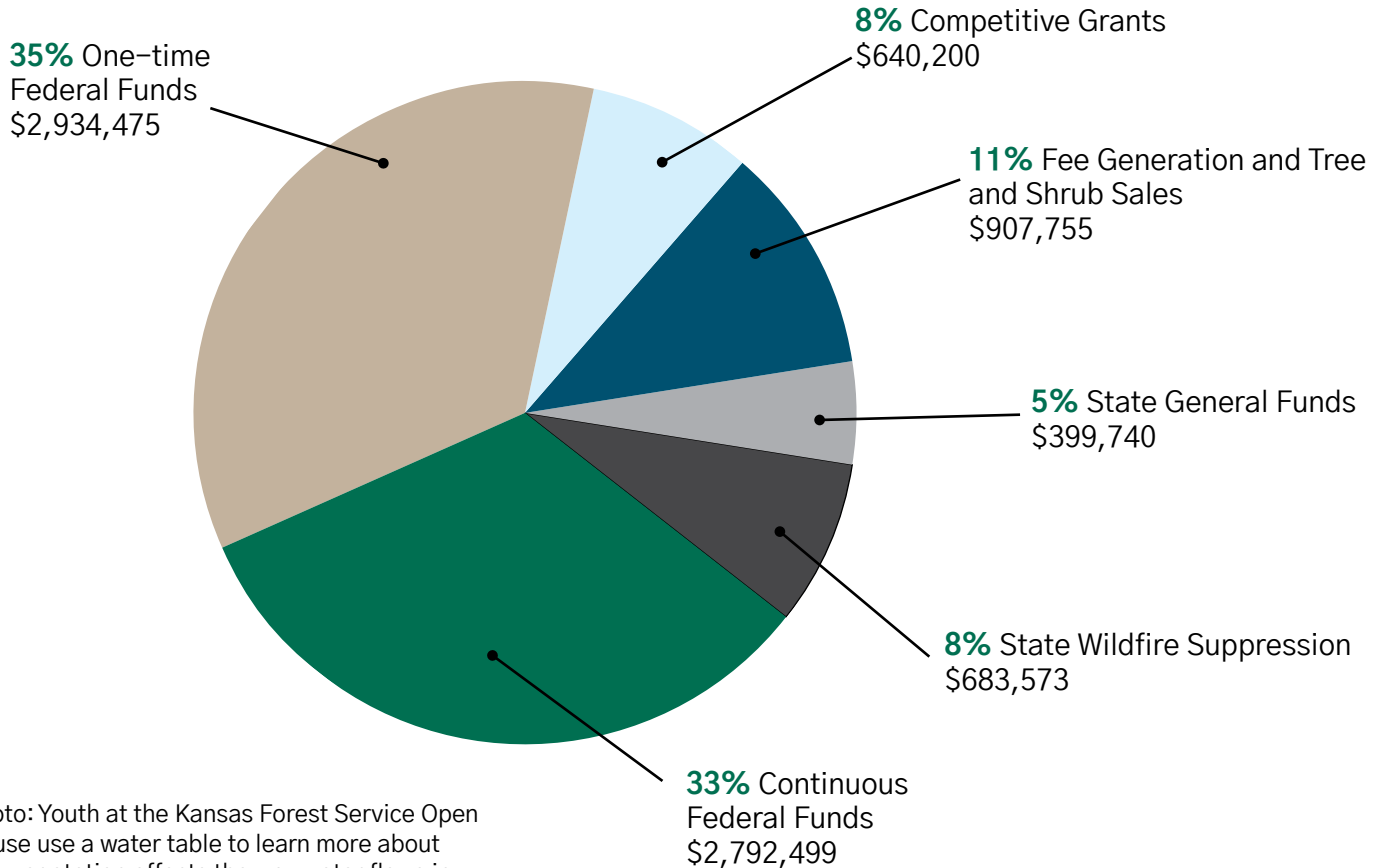


Photo: Youth at the Kansas Forest Service Open House use a water table to learn more about how vegetation affects the way water flows in streams, creeks, and rivers.



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