



Forest Service
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Forest Service Equity Action Plan 2023–2024

Mission Area: Natural Resources and Environment

www.usda.gov/equity/action-plan



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Message From the Under Secretary

It is with gratitude that I acknowledge the Forest Service for their Equity Action Plan accomplishments over the past year. Forest Service Chief Randy Moore and Forest Service employees across America recognize the importance of culturally appropriate responsiveness to the needs of Tribes and historically underserved communities as integral to the stewardship of our natural resources for the benefit of future generations. Truly serving all American people demands that we continue to do the work to reach those who previously were unable to benefit from their forests and grasslands.

I recognize the Forest Service for their innovative approach to operationalize the Equity Action Plan in the coming year. As reflected in the plan, we can look forward to the Forest Service expanding Limited English Proficiency employee training and delivery; reviewing the [Small Business Program website](#) to mitigate barriers faced by Tribes and underserved communities in their pursuit of contract and procurement opportunities with the agency; elevating environmental justice and the allocation of resources to disadvantaged communities through Justice 40 programs; and expanding ways of analyzing Equity Actions with the enhanced Forest Service Equity Data Strategy and Forest Service Equity Data Landing Page.

Recognizing that the Forest Service manages millions of acres of land that include the ancestral homelands of American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations, I commend the agency for the historic USDA Forest Service Action Plan: Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships that they unveiled in fiscal year 2023 to strengthen relations with Indian Country and advance Tribal co-stewardship of the Nation's forests and grasslands. While I appreciate the Forest Service's efforts to institutionalize their Equity Action Plan, Tribal action plan, and forthcoming Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan, the real story of accomplishment is in the steadfastness, commitment, creativity, and determination of each Forest Service employee in leading countless acts of catalytic change. These efforts will continue shifting the way public service is equitably distributed to those in need for years to come.



Under Secretary Dr. Homer L. Wilkes

*– Dr. Homer L. Wilkes
Under Secretary, Natural Resources and the Environment*

Message From the Chief

It is my privilege to share the Forest Service Equity Action Plan, which outlines our agency's commitment and supports the U.S. Department of Agriculture's and Administration's leadership in advancing racial equity and support for underserved communities. Focusing on the high-impact actions outlined in this report will benefit Tribes, partners, the public, and employees.

These actions will help us advance equity within and across core program areas and ensure a cohesive and consistent approach throughout the Forest Service. As we continue to implement the plan, we will need to connect the dots for all employees and show how everyday decisions fit within the Forest Service's equitable vision for the future. To do this, we must anchor our work to our mission: "To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations." We recognize that present and future generations are represented by the diverse public and that we must serve them in an equitable way.

Being equity-centered means we will purposefully engage everyone—including Tribes and underserved, rural, minority, and low-income populations—throughout decision-making processes and engagement opportunities. When we engage communities, we must be sure to address the historical and cultural inequities that are a legacy part of our systems.

Equitable access to the benefits forests and grasslands provide is a matter of necessity and survival for communities into the future. Therefore, given the unprecedented opportunities we have at this moment in time, we must work together and act urgently and in a purposefully equitable manner to make meaningful, long-lasting shifts to improve outcomes in all of the communities we serve.

At the Forest Service, we *must* change to center equity in everything we do. We invite you to join us in this journey and continue to be a part of our efforts as we march forward in advancing equity at the Forest Service.



Forest Service Chief Randy Moore

*– Randy Moore
Forest Service Chief*

Introduction

Delivering the Forest Service’s mission in a purposefully equitable manner requires changing traditional perspectives, processes, actions, and performance measures to ensure the agency makes the full suite of benefits, outcomes, and opportunities to participate available to all, especially in rural and urban places that have been marginalized or overlooked by the Federal Government. The Forest Service performs its best work with and through others. The foundation for the agency’s success depends on having a high-performing, representative, and service-focused workforce. The agency’s success in equitable mission delivery depends on employees who share stewardship, mirror the people they serve, and build community connections.

The Forest Service prides itself on being a learning organization that continuously improves and transforms itself to meet the ecological and social needs before us. As we continue to move through these challenging, unprecedented times in our Nation and in the communities we serve daily, there have been conflicting, often misunderstood beliefs around systemic racism, racial and social inequities, prejudice, and the public services intended to serve everyone. There is an immediate need for Forest Service leadership, employees, and partners to explore these topics and become strong, active allies in the fight for racial and social justice, and diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). This is consistent with our being a values-based, purpose-driven, and relationship-focused organization. Our core values (see graphic to the right) help us connect with emerging learning about the complexities of achieving justice, equity, and equality. They increase our capacity to leverage the diversity of our workforce and better understand the cultural context of diverse communities.

Being an equity-centered organization simply means that we are sharing information in a way that everyone can understand as well as allocating resources and delivering programs in differentiated and targeted ways to achieve fair outcomes and opportunities for all. Working together to find best practices that ensure our neighboring national forest communities, Tribes, and marginalized communities feel heard, accepted, and supported is critical in the work to achieve racial equity, and social and environmental justice.

AS EMPLOYEES OF THE FOREST SERVICE, WE BELIEVE IN

-  **SERVICE.**
To each other. To the American people. To the planet.
-  **INTERDEPENDENCE.**
Of all things. People and nature. Communities and colleagues. The past, present, and future.
-  **CONSERVATION.**
Protection when necessary. Preservation when appropriate. Restoration, when needed, and wise management for multiple use and enjoyment always.
-  **DIVERSITY.**
People and cultures. Perspectives and ideas. Experiences and ecosystems.
-  **SAFETY.**
In every way: physical, psychological, and social.

Equity Actions and Accomplishments

The Forest Service launched its equity-centered journey with the submission of the Forest Service's first Equity Action Plan to USDA leadership in February 2022. The Forest Service Equity Action Plan focuses on high-impact actions with the potential to create significant long-term systemic change that benefits Tribes, partners, the public, and employees. These high-impact actions reflect our commitment to implement [Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) and [Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#).

Over the past year, the Forest Service has used the guiding actions in the plan to shift how underserved communities are experiencing and accessing agency programs and services. We continue to do this by looking internally to become more culturally competent and empathetic in the way we design policies, build trust, reduce barriers, and increase program equity in places that need help the most.

The Forest Service Equity Actions are organized into three overarching themes: Community Service to All, Economic Stability, and Health and Resilience. These actions work in partnership with the recently released [USDA Forest Service Action Plan: Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#), and the Forest Service DEIA Strategic Plan currently under development and planned for release later this year. Our actions have been informed by the [USDA Equity Commission Interim Report \(2023\)](#), which includes recommendations made to USDA to advance equity for all and institutionalize equity to drive compliance, accountability, and culture change across USDA agencies. Additionally, the Forest Service has made strides in implementing the Justice40 Initiative and renewing commitments to provide meaningful access for people with limited English proficiency, as highlighted in the equity accomplishments below.

Community Service to All

Action 1: Position the Agency and Tribes for Success in Co-Stewardship

Under this action, the Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations (OTR) is positioning the agency and Tribes for success by expanding Tribal co-stewardship through enhanced engagement and partnership with Tribes. By identifying barriers and opportunities that affect Tribes, we are creating shared leadership and achieving enduring change for equitable mission delivery. This action reduces barriers to Tribes through the use of existing authorities meant to promote the preservation of Tribal assets on the National Forest System (NFS) by reducing risk to Tribal lands and communities, restoring traditional landscapes, and promoting climate-resilient Tribal infrastructure and forest health. Forest Service goals in co-stewardship and execution of Tribal authorities are to integrate Tribal sovereignty, reserved treaty rights, and Indigenous Knowledge into agency planning and decision-making, and equity for Tribal nations in agency investments and opportunities that support Tribal communities and economies.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to increase funding for technical assistance and invest in local experts and communities through

cooperative agreements with Tribes as well as elevating the OTR within the agency, as reflected in the recently renamed State, Private and Tribal Forestry deputy area.

Key Accomplishments

The release of the [USDA Forest Service Action Plan: Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#), the product of diverse perspectives from the unit, regional, and national levels of the agency, has been an integral accomplishment supporting this equity action. It provides agency guidance and assistance to fulfill the general Federal trust responsibility, honor treaties, and support Tribal self-determination principles. The plan provides a framework for advancing existing laws, regulations, and policies in the Forest Service and can be implemented through existing programs and processes. To achieve activities outlined in the plan, the Forest Service developed a 3-tier Tribal relations training for staff including regional leadership, line officers, other staff with Tribal relations responsibilities, and all Forest Service employees. This internal engagement will prepare Forest Service employees to better understand reserved treaty rights on the NFS lands, identify best practices and model agreements, and capture lessons learned in co-stewardship, thereby strengthening our equitable mission delivery.

The Forest Service OTR has also continued collaboration with Tribes, which resulted in a landmark Intergovernmental Cooperative Agreement signed in 2022 between USDA Forest Service and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management with funding for additional agreements with the five Tribes of the Bears Ears Commission: Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Ute Indian Tribe of the Uintah and Ouray Reservation, and the Pueblo of Zuni. This agreement informs management of the Bears Ears National Monument and funds Tribal capacity to coordinate and cooperate in Federal management of 1.36 million acres of the Bears Ears National Monument on the Manti-La Sal National Forest in Utah. All involved parties met regularly to discuss progress and co-develop the resource management plan for the monument.

Looking Ahead

OTR is working with the Work Environment and Performance Office (WEPO) and Office of Civil Rights to co-host the 2023 Forest Service Summit: Training To Advance Equity and Uphold Tribal Sovereignty. The purpose of the summit is to serve as a catalytic event that will shift outcomes for Indigenous and underserved communities by embedding diversity, equity, inclusion, and Tribal sovereignty in the Forest Service's mission delivery.

OTR is developing an external campaign to generate awareness, welcome diversity and inclusivity, and create connections around respect and responsibility on national forests and grasslands, while honoring cultural connections and Indigenous Knowledge through updated signage, especially at recreational areas, to include Tribal history and perspectives.

The Forest Service will continue to consult and collaborate with Tribes during the forest plan revision process, including the development of plan components, standards, guidelines, and management approaches. Currently, forest plans are being revised agencywide, to establish broad, long-range, general management direction to maintain or achieve desired conditions. Together, desired conditions and objectives describe what actions Forest Service managers

intend to implement across the landscape while still providing sustainable usage by individuals and communities. The Forest Service will continue to identify opportunities for co-stewardship, including utilizing Tribal authorities and keystone agreements. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) provide the agency much-needed resources to execute our mission and to address the largest and most-complex problems, including the wildfire and climate crises that affect many Indigenous communities. These agreements are critical to allow the Forest Service to execute priority projects efficiently and effectively.

Action 2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities through Culturally Relevant Strategies and DEIA-focused Partnerships

Under this action, the Forest Service is centering the voices, diverse needs, and unique perspectives of Tribes and underserved community stakeholders. This action reduces barriers experienced by underserved communities by focusing on internal education and awareness to grow equity-centered leaders through implementation of an agencywide equity toolkit to achieve enduring change for equitable mission delivery.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to increase partnerships with organizations that have strong DEIA plans on file and reduce barriers to partnering with the Forest Service for organizations that support underserved audiences through their programming and service delivery. This action also aligns with the recommendation to train staff to be culturally sensitive and better understand the diverse needs of the constituents we serve.

Key Accomplishments

The Forest Service has engaged in an internal awareness campaign to ensure all employees understand the requirements of Executive Orders 13985 and 14091, and collectively commit to embedding equity into our agency values and decision-making processes. Key outcomes of this campaign include the development of an internal Forest Service DEIA webpage, which includes links to related laws, memoranda and orders, and resources for advancing equity locally. The agency also developed and launched an external website, which houses the Equity Action Plan and will soon include an executive summary of the plan offered in eight languages. The Forest Service established an Equity Core Team in WEPO that has delivered presentations and trainings to more than 1,000 leaders and staff in the Forest Service over the past year to outline pathways for expanding on equity actions in the field. Earlier this year, the Equity Core Team released an equity toolkit, which provides best practices and tips for advancing equity in agency processes including hiring, engagement, mapping, decision-making, and training.

An ongoing partnership with the [Next100 Coalition](#) has resulted in internal listening sessions with employees to expand understanding of barriers to diverse recreation experiences and visitation use, leading to recommendations for increasing equity in recreation (see Action 8 for more detail). The National Partnerships Office has hosted monthly community of practice sessions for those working or interested in advancing DEIA partnerships. This community of practice and newly revised content in a Partnerships Learning Series promote diverse

partnerships, networking, sharing of best practices, and feature speakers and presentations centered around advancing equity and justice.

Looking Ahead

The 2023 Forest Service Summit: Training To Advance Equity and Uphold Tribal Sovereignty for Forest Service employees will help sustain commitment and momentum on implementation of equity and justice initiatives across the Forest Service's Equity Action Plan, *Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships* action plan, and DEIA strategy as well as introduce the concept of a trained network of employees engaged in and responsible for advancing equity locally.

The Forest Service, in partnership with the Next100 Coalition will work together to ensure broad outreach to diverse communities ahead of external engagement sessions for the [Reimagine Recreation](#) effort to center equity and diversity in future decision-making efforts. The Diversity, Development, and Outreach Team of the National Partnerships Office will establish a pioneering cohort composed of non-traditional partners. This accelerator program will bring together leaders in the DEIA space to provide targeted outreach to untapped partners with the goal of breaking down barriers and implementing customized DEIA strategies that align with Executive Orders 13985 and 14091, USDA DEIA Strategic Plan, Forest Service DEIA Strategic Plan, and Justice40 goals.

Economic Stability

The Forest Service is increasing equitable access to Forest Service contracts and grants by integrating equity into proposal analysis, outreach, scoring, and guidance as well as addressing barriers to participation.

Action 3: Increase Equity in Opportunities for Small and Disadvantaged Businesses in Delivering the Forest Service's Mission

Under this action, the Forest Service Procurement and Property Services (PPS) staff is initiating a pilot program to provide further support to small and disadvantaged businesses by increasing capacity in procurement zones, building deeper relationships with Tribes and local small and disadvantaged businesses, and demonstrating a strong commitment to recurring national and local outreach event efforts. This action to increase equity in opportunities for small and disadvantaged businesses reduces barriers and advances equity by conducting historical research to identify trends and areas of opportunity. By connecting these businesses with factual information and opportunities, the agency bridges the information gap and empowers them to compete on a level playing field. Building deeper relationships with Tribes and local small and disadvantaged businesses allows the Forest Service to understand their specific needs and create targeted solutions. Additionally, a strong commitment to recurring national and local outreach events fosters dialogue, knowledge sharing, and networking. Through these comprehensive measures, the agency aims to create a more equitable landscape, empowering small and disadvantaged businesses to thrive and contribute to economic growth.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to focus on procurement and supplier diversity; specifically, to work with underserved and underrepresented businesses and build the capacity and experience necessary to gain equitable access to supplier, contracting, and procurement programs.

Key Accomplishments

The Forest Service has created a public-facing [Small Business Program website](#) to provide consistent, relevant, and timely information on small business and procurement opportunities at the Forest Service. This past year, the agency successfully organized the first Tribal business outreach event with over 70 participating businesses from more than 30 states, where over half of the businesses in attendance were new entrants to the Forest Service, indicating a significant expansion of opportunities and engagement for previously untapped entities. As a result of the event, the small business program team has hosted over 40 one-on-one small business sessions with businesses across the country, providing personalized support and guidance to foster meaningful partnerships and collaborations. Additionally, the Forest Service established an internal site as a central location for contracting activities and PPS staff to access consistent information about the Equity Action Plan as it relates to the small business program, ensuring vendors receive consistent information and customer service.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Forest Service will implement the agency Tribal business goal in alignment with other small business goals, pending research into relevant statutes and regulations. The agency will also begin the assessment of policy updates and changes based on critical findings from the past year of data research and barrier analyses, ensuring that barriers to equity and access are identified and addressed effectively by PPS staff. Finally, the Forest Service will conduct research on extracting small business data from government purchase card program expenditures, aiming to capture a comprehensive view of small business achievement across the agency to improve reporting accuracy.

Action 4: Increase Equity and Access in the Grants and Agreements Program in Delivering the Forest Service's Mission

Under this action, the Office of Grants and Agreements (G&A) is changing the way we do business—to create and enhance opportunities for participation and partnership with the Forest Service. G&A is developing innovative outreach strategies to broaden our network of partners and taking action to remove barriers to participation by Tribal entities in grants and agreements. We are emphasizing these government-to-government relationships in our thinking, and growing the newly established Access Branch, which is dedicated to exceptional service to the public in the pre- and post-award funding phases.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to increase partnerships with organizations that have strong DEIA plans on file and reduce barriers to partnering with the Forest Service for organizations that support underserved audiences through their programming and service delivery.

Key Accomplishments

The Forest Service fully updated the public-facing [G&A website](#) to directly connect the public to project, partnership, and other funding opportunities. This past year, the agency created a new Access Branch as a public resource for applicants. The branch established an appointment booking line and inbox to remove barriers and provide potential new partners one-on-one assistance on grant application submissions, created accessible pre-award and award administration guides for grant-funded opportunities, and participated in outreach webinars targeting new recipients. The staff also hired the first-ever Tribal relations policy analyst who works closely with OTR, assesses barriers to participation for Tribal entities, and makes recommendations to the policy branch for systemic changes to reduce barriers to Tribal partnership opportunities.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Forest Service will initiate a first-of-its-kind information collection effort to capture an organizational profile of applicants, including operating budgets, staffing, and communities served to better advance equity and diversity of agency partnerships. The Access Branch will continue to facilitate partnership opportunities and outreach through Grants.gov and implement marketing strategies to promote funding opportunities with emphasis on reaching underrepresented communities. The agency is also working with the Office of Civil Rights to convert grants and agreements resource guides to Spanish language to increase access.

Health and Resilience

Action 5: Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribes and Underserved Communities

The Forest Service is targeting wildfire prevention where it is needed most, including underserved and Tribal communities, by investing in research, addressing matching requirements, selecting projects, providing training, and conducting barrier analyses to facilitate robust investments in underserved communities.

Under this action, the Forest Service aims for the equitable distribution of benefits and the mitigation of disproportionate negative impacts of agency wildfire risk reduction activities to Tribes and disadvantaged communities. To reduce wildfire risk to these communities, this action will support consistent and appropriate integration of data and tools in project planning and decision-making associated with wildland fire management (e.g., mitigation, prevention, preparedness, fuels, operations, and post fire) and implementation of the [USDA Forest Service Action Plan: Confronting the Wildfire Crisis, A Strategy for Protecting Communities and Improving Resilience in America's Forests](#).

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to provide benefits to vulnerable communities, such as farmworkers, their families, and their organizations in addressing the impact of natural disasters and climate change, including wildfires.

Key Accomplishments

The Forest Service released an update of [Wildfire Risk to Communities \(WRC\)](#), a decision-support tool incorporating Tribal jurisdictions and new social science information on demographics vulnerable to wildfire. The agency finalized an updated firehatched map and incorporated various factors to illustrate social and demographic conditions within and surrounding [Wildfire Crisis Strategy](#) landscapes, including data from Tribal maps and the [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#). A new team established to advance this work developed guidance for building partnerships and communicating with disadvantaged communities using relevant social science data. In partnership with the Intertribal Timber Council and OTR, the Forest Service hosted a 4-part virtual dialogue series for Tribes, Tribal organizations, Forest Service staff, and others related to workforce capacity building.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Forest Service will promote and leverage research that examines unique experiences, priorities, and needs of disadvantaged communities related to wildfire preparedness, risk reduction, operations, and post-fire recovery. This promotion will ensure that employees have the appropriate access and knowledge to apply and interpret data that considers important social science trends and conditions in projects and priorities. The agency will also develop and implement internal/external trainings that focus on the needs of Tribes and disadvantaged communities in fire and risk management efforts. These capacity building efforts will increase internal/external awareness of Federal grants and agreement opportunities for wildfire preparedness, smoke preparedness, and post-fire recovery.

The Forest Service is committed to identifying and overcoming persistent, systemic barriers that Tribes and disadvantaged communities face accessing information and funding opportunities. This would ensure that the Forest Service is collaboratively identifying barriers to agency protocols, requirements, and certifications, and addressing those identified barriers by building solutions with the input of those affected. The agency plans to develop nationally consistent spatial data and maps of disadvantaged communities at risk of wildfire based on the best available science and data. Using the best corporate data consistently will help avoid disproportionate harm and foster equitable benefits from hazardous fuels management (e.g., develop of community wildfire protection plans, frame monitoring, and design projects and emergency response support during wildfire events).

Having the right internal capacity for this work is critical for relationship building and sustained implementation of efforts. For this reason, the Forest Service will recruit, hire, and train dedicated staff to support engagement and potential future recruitment within disadvantaged communities, including Tribes. Finally, the agency plans to explore reduction of cooperator matching requirements for competitive funding opportunities related to wildfire risk reduction (coordinated with Action 4). This will increase ready access to critical funds and programs that would benefit disadvantaged communities, including Tribes.

Action 6: Expand Cooperative Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities

Under this action, the Forest Service leverages the Landscape Scale Restoration Program (a competitive grant program that promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority rural forest landscapes) to advance DEIA principles by integrating equity considerations and data into the proposal evaluation and guidance for competitive processes, including prioritizing discretionary points for projects that directly benefit underserved communities. In addition, we enhance outreach and technical assistance to newly eligible Tribal partners and other applicants to attract proposals from rural communities.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to increase partnerships with organizations that have strong DEIA plans on file and reduce barriers to partner with the Forest Service for organizations that support underserved audiences through their programming and service delivery.

Key Accomplishments

This past year, the Forest Service received a legal determination that Tribal trust land is eligible for Landscape Scale Restoration Program funding, which facilitated the expansion of program benefits to Tribes. The Forest Service then launched the first competitive request for proposals for Federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native corporations/villages to expand Tribal participation in the Landscape Scale Restoration Program and to restore priority forest landscapes on Tribal land, including trust land. The Landscape Restoration Program awarded \$3 million to Tribal projects in Fiscal Year 2023. The agency also developed national equity guidance to integrate equity considerations into the regional request for proposals and scoring criteria—projects that showed a direct benefit to and/or intentional engagement of disadvantaged communities received priority consideration.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Forest Service will characterize and communicate 2023 projects to the public through a national press release to expand awareness of these economic opportunities. The agency is committed to providing proposal scoring and guidance for Fiscal Year 2024 to prioritize discretionary points for projects that show direct benefit to and/or intentional engagement of disadvantaged communities. Under the new scoring guidance, each region's scoring methodology dedicates a minimum of 5 percent to equity considerations. The Forest Service will issue Fiscal Year 2024 requests for proposals for West, South, and Northeast/Midwest regions that prioritize equity in the proposal and scoring guidance and a standalone Tribal request for applications. The agency will simultaneously explore the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool as a resource to characterize the program moving forward as well as other local data-driven tools and resources.

Landscape Scale Restoration Program staff intend to establish new relationships with private sector partners interested in co-funding or supporting Tribal landscape scale restoration projects. The goal is to identify partners who can help bridge the non-Federal funding gap many Tribes face in meeting the statutory financial-match requirements of the program. Under current statute, the Secretary of Agriculture does not have the discretion to waive financial-match requirements for this program.

Action 7: Expand Urban and Community Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities

The Forest Service is expanding urban forestry benefits by increasing access, providing education, and promoting use of equity data tools when making grants and targeting investments in the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program.

Under this action, the Forest Service is committed to issue requests for proposals while highlighting equity considerations, develop explicit criteria for requests for proposals and evaluation guidance to prioritize underserved communities, enhance outreach to prospective applicants to attract proposals from Tribes and high-need urban communities, and work toward funding 40 percent of projects in underserved communities and with Tribes as part of the Justice40 Initiative.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to increase partnerships with organizations that have strong DEIA plans on file and reduce barriers to partnering with the Forest Service for organizations that support underserved audiences through their programming and service delivery.

Key Accomplishments

The Urban and Community Forestry Program is continuing to address feedback gathered at the November 2021 national stakeholder engagement meeting in response to Justice40 guidance, through funding announcement outreach, web-based application templates, and increased Federal investment to make opportunities more accessible. [Websites](#) and [toolkits](#) are being enhanced and public-facing webinars and roundtables have been scheduled and/or completed to increase program awareness.

As the only designated urban forestry program in the Federal Government, the Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program engages with a network of over 250 State forestry and partner organizations, educational institutions, and Tribal governments to deliver the program effectively and efficiently to over 7,500 communities annually. The Urban and Community Forestry Program is the USDA lead for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)'s [Urban Waters Federal Partnership Initiative \(UWFP\)](#), and directly supports several existing UWFP sites. The program has established partnerships with USDA Office of Urban Agriculture and Innovative Production around urban food security, the White House Council on Environmental Quality on America the Beautiful, and EPA's recreation economy work.

Looking Ahead

Over the course of the next year, the Urban and Community Forestry Program will continue supporting projects through \$1 billion in grants made available by USDA from the IRA to expand access to urban nature, combat the climate crisis, and advance environmental justice. In addition to the grant funding, the USDA Forest Service is providing up to \$250 million to States and territories to further local efforts to support urban communities through equitable access to trees and the benefits they provide. Advance release of these funds to States occurred in April 2023, specifically for support to disadvantaged communities. The Forest Service

established a new agreement with the African American Mayors Association (AAMA) to provide communications and stakeholder engagement support of underserved communities. As a result, the Urban and Community Forestry IRA Public Notice of Funding appeared in the May 2023 AAMA newsletter, increasing visibility and outreach of program opportunities.

Action 8: Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences in Underserved Communities

The Forest Service is conducting analyses to identify barriers to participation in recreation and outdoor experiences, promoting responsive social science research, updating directives and policy, developing more accessible permitting application processes, and enhancing partnerships and engagement through collaboration and diverse communication strategies.

Under this action, the Forest Service aims to promote research to better understand who visitors are, how they recreate, who is not recreating, and what barriers exist in underserved communities when it comes to accessing recreation opportunities. This action also aims to identify economic, community, and personal benefits of recreation and better understand preferences and satisfaction with recreation opportunities. Activities in this action include developing research-based strategies to reduce barriers and increase visitation by underserved communities and promoting use of the Native American Tourism and Improving Visitor Experience (NATIVE) Act in support of Tribal culture and the tourism enterprise.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to train staff to be culturally sensitive and better understand the diverse needs of the constituents we serve.

Key Accomplishments

This past year, the Forest Service established two new recreation special-use positions within the NFS to support increased participation by underserved community groups. The agency revised communication materials to be more inclusive and reflect the diversity of recreation users on national forests and grasslands. To expand opportunities for diverse access to special-use permits, the agency conducted an analysis of existing permit data to identify junctures where underserved groups experience the greatest barriers to accessing recreation special-use permits and identified additional data needs. The Forest Service identified the modernization of special-use permitting as a high-impact service provider and is working with Office of Management and Budget Customer Experience to improve performance. Finally, the agency initiated internal engagement for the Reimagine Recreation strategic planning efforts to harness the knowledge of employees and better understand the complex issues associated with DEIA, as well as identify future opportunities, when managing and connecting with recreation on national forests and grasslands.

Looking Ahead

Over the next year, the Forest Service aims to better understand current and future visitor preferences to allow the agency to modernize and provide improved recreation and outdoor access to national forests and grasslands. The agency will use social-science research while collaborating with partners to engage Tribes and DEIA-focused organizations to inform best

practices to reduce barriers to recreation and the outdoors. In partnership with the Next100 Coalition, the Forest Service is preparing to begin external engagement with Tribes and stakeholders on the agency's Reimagine Recreation strategic planning effort to help advise an updated strategy and action plan in creating a place for everyone to feel welcome and connected to the outdoors.

New Equity Action

Action 9: Implement an Agencywide Equity Data Strategy

The Forest Service will develop an agencywide Equity Data Strategy to ensure increased accountability and effectiveness of agency equity goals. Tracking investments and benefits in underserved and disadvantaged communities allows the agency to better understand where we are successful in advancing equity and highlight barriers to advancing DEIA principles through program delivery. This strategy ensures the Forest Service has the right data, engages in appropriate analysis, and uses data to further programmatic equity goals.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to improve data collection and public reporting of demographic data related to agency program implementation.

Looking Ahead

The Forest Service has established a national equity data manager role to serve as a bridge across program areas, providing up-to-date information from the Department and increasing alignment of equity data activities in the Forest Service. An equity data landing page, planned to launch soon, will serve as a one-stop shop for information on equity definitions, relevant legislation, and internal data tracking systems. The equity data strategy will focus on identifying data gaps in equity actions focused on agency investments, in coordination with Actions 3 and 4 under the Economic Stability theme. The equity data manager will work with the Department to develop more specific actions for collecting information to bridge data gaps, as well as develop field guidance for data application in prioritization, analysis, and decision-making, and enhance equity data dashboards. For example, work is underway on a dashboard enhancement for Justice40, using data from the G&A program.

Integrated Equity Efforts

Limited English Proficiency

The Office of Civil Rights is working to develop the Forest Service's DEIA Strategic Plan, which supports the USDA DEIA Strategic Goals for FY2022-2026. The agency is working to advance DEIA within the agency and the public we serve with complementary plans and tools, including the Forest Service Equity Action Plan and the Forest Service Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships action plan. One of those tools is the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) program that is integral to advancing DEIA in the agency. LEP enables program managers to provide Federal program services to a public that has limited English proficiency.

By offering LEP translation and interpretive services, we give direct access, hence greater access to those that would otherwise experience language barriers to our program benefits. LEP is integrated in the specific activities of Action 2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities through Culturally Relevant Strategies and DEIA-focused Partnerships, Action 4: Increase Equity and Access in the Grants and Agreements Program in Delivering the Forest Service's Mission, Action 5: Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribes and Underserved Communities, Action 8: Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Underserved Communities, and Action 9: Implement an Agencywide Equity Data Strategy.

Activities in this action align with USDA Equity Commission recommendations to improve customer experience by expanding interpretation and translation services and providing more accuracy and cultural competency.

Key Accomplishments

This past year, the Forest Service expanded LEP training to all employees via agencywide training in AgLearn and delivery of live and recorded webinars posted on the Civil Rights website. The Civil Rights Title VI specialists marketed these trainings to field employees and embedded the trainings throughout the Equity Action Plan and agencywide equity toolkit. The Civil Rights program staffed an LEP manager position to continue to advance this work and provide resources to employees regarding translation and interpretation services contract opportunities. This past year, the Office of Civil Rights awarded multiple blanket purchase agreements with an option to expand in additional years, available for use across USDA. Over the course of 2022, the LEP program translated approximately 450 key documents in ten languages (mostly Spanish) and conducted 35 live interpretation calls in six languages. Local field units selling permits and providing visitor information used the live interpretation call service most frequently.

Looking Ahead

Moving forward, the Office of Civil Rights will engage Forest Service staffs, such as Fire and Aviation Management and Office of Communication to develop individual contracts that address special or immediate LEP needs that existing contracts do not currently cover. The agency will also modify the current contract to include additional languages, including English and seven Alaska Native languages. A permanent, full-time LEP program manager will be hired to continue advancing this work. Finally, the Forest Service will expand the LEP program by developing agencywide LEP guidance and expand the LEP program reach in Action 5: Reduce Wildfire Risk to Tribes and Underserved Communities and Action 8: Promote Access to Recreation and Outdoor Experiences within Underserved Communities.

Justice40 Initiative

[Executive Order 14008, Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad](#), launched the Justice40 Initiative, establishing a government-wide goal of directing 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments from covered programs to flow to disadvantaged communities. The Justice40 Initiative applies to a whole of government approach to advancing environmental justice and equity. Per White House guidance, a Justice40 “covered program” is a Federal

Government program that falls within the scope of the Justice40 Initiative because it includes “covered investments” in one or more of the following seven areas: climate change; clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transportation; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development (related to climate, natural disasters, environment, clean energy, clean transportation, housing, water and wastewater infrastructure, and legacy pollution reduction, including in energy communities); remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and critical clean water and waste infrastructure.

In February 2023, USDA requested the development of implementation plans for all covered Justice40 programs, including those identified and proposed following the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The purpose of these implementation plans is to identify actions the agency will take to promote USDA’s progress in enhancing how benefits from Justice40 programs flow to “disadvantaged” or Justice40 communities. Agencies are directed to ensure funding reaches disadvantaged/Justice40 communities and leverages award-making, contracting, technical assistance, and mandatory funding streams. This includes prioritizing or awarding extra points to applications and projects that meet the criteria for benefitting Justice40 communities, as discussed in Equity Action 6: Expand Cooperative Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities and Equity Action 7: Expand Urban and Community Forestry Benefits to Underserved Communities. Equity Action 9: Implement an Agencywide Equity Data Strategy, will further advance Justice40 goals by identifying and addressing data gaps in reporting on investments to disadvantaged/Justice40 communities.

Looking Ahead

Justice40 implementation plans include a myriad of actions ranging in size, scope, and funding, but each plan provides benefits to Justice40 communities. Moving forward, the Forest Service will work on identifying points of integration between proposed program modifications listed in the Justice40 implementation plans and activities committed to under each of the nine equity actions, to ensure shared accountability and success in achieving mutual equity and environmental justice goals.

Conclusion

The Forest Service can only succeed in its mission if it ensures communities most impacted by our converging climate, economic, and health crises receive the benefits of our programs and services. Equity is not an add-on or extra initiative; it is central to the agency’s mission: “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” Implementing the Forest Service Equity Action Plan will result in eliminating barriers across programs, helping the agency to truly fulfill our commitment to care for the land and serve all communities equitably. The denial of freedom, dignity, and prosperity to any community holds the entire Nation back. Conversely, an equitable society benefits everyone—when we lift each other up, we are all lifted up. As we look ahead to the next year of work, this renewed commitment to equity must remain a multi-generational effort that is the responsibility of all agencies across the Federal Government. By redoubling our efforts, the Forest Service can help bridge the gap between the world we see and the future we seek.

For more information on equity at FS, and all of USDA, see usda.gov/equity.

USDA Mission Statement

“To serve all Americans by providing effective, innovative, science-based public policy leadership in agriculture, food and nutrition, natural resource protection and management, rural development, and related issues with a commitment to delivering equitable and climate-smart opportunities that inspire and help America thrive.”

Selected Equity Resources and Information

USDA Equity-Related Summary Reports and Guidance

- Programmatic Equity at USDA:
 - [Equity Website](#)
 - [Equity Accomplishments](#)
 - Equity Action Plan: [Full Plan | Summary](#) (February 2022)
- Equity Commission
 - [Equity Commission Website](#)
 - [2023 Interim Report | USDA Response \(English\)](#) (February 2023)
 - [Informe Interino 2023 | Respuesta al Informe Interino de la Comisión de Equidad del USDA | \(En Español\)](#) (Febrero 2023)
- [USDA Environmental Justice Scorecard](#)
- [USDA Advisory Committees](#)
- [Get Started! A Guide to USDA Resources for Historically Underserved Farmers and Ranchers](#) (July 2022)

Selected Equity-Related Executive Orders and White House Resources

- [White House Equity Page](#)
- [Executive Order 13985, Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (January 2021)
- [Executive Order 14091, Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) (February 2023)
- [Executive Order 14096, Revitalizing our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#) (April 2023)
- [Executive Order 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments](#)
- [Presidential Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#)
- [The Path to Achieving Justice40](#)

Forest Service Resources

- [Forest Service Equity Action Plan website](#)
- [Strengthening Tribal Consultations and Nation-to-Nation Relationships: A USDA Forest Service Action Plan](#)
- [Forest Service Small Business Program website](#)
- [Forest Service Grants & Agreements website](#)

Department Equity Action Plan Goals

1. Reducing Barriers to USDA Programs

USDA is reducing barriers to programs and improving support to underserved farmers, ranchers, landowners, businesses, and communities, including by providing ways for stakeholders to share their experiences, insights, and needs and by incorporating that input into policy development and implementation improvement.

2. Partnering with Trusted Technical Assistance Providers

USDA is partnering with trusted technical assistance providers to ensure that underserved producers and communities have the support they need to access USDA programs.

3. Directing USDA Programs to Those Who Need Them the Most

USDA programs are targeting those who need them the most, including by increasing infrastructure investments that benefit underserved communities.

4. Expanding Equitable Access to USDA Nutrition Assistance Programs

USDA is expanding equitable access to USDA nutrition assistance programs to ensure that those who qualify are able to participate, those who participate get benefits that are meaningful, and those who receive those benefits can use them conveniently and in ways that promote improvements in their health and well-being.

5. Advancing Equity in Federal Procurement

USDA is advancing equity in Federal procurement, by providing underserved and disadvantaged businesses, tools and resources to increase access to funding opportunities and expand their network to develop critical local, State, regional, and National relationships.

6. Upholding Federal Trust and Treaty Responsibilities to Indian Tribes

USDA is upholding the general Federal trust and treaty responsibilities to Indian Tribes, removing barriers to access USDA programs, incorporating Tribal self-determination principles, and incorporating indigenous values and perspectives in program design and delivery.

7. Committing Unwaveringly to Civil Rights

USDA has committed unwaveringly to civil rights, working to equip its civil rights offices with the tools, skills, capacity, and processes essential to enforce and uphold civil rights effectively and efficiently.

8. Operating with Transparency and Accountability

USDA is operating transparently and accountably, providing information on Department programs that Congress, stakeholders, and the general public need to hold us to account on our equity agenda, and working systematically to collect and take account of public feedback.

Plan Leads:

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Anznette Randall, Director, Office of Civil Rights

Front Cover Photo: Participants of the Minorities in Natural Resources and Related Sciences (MANRRS) Conference and Hiring Event in Atlanta, GA take a “Mobile Tour” guided by Forest Service employees to visit the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest and the Anna Ruby Falls on the Chattooga River Ranger District. USDA Forest Service photo by Preston Keres.

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Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA’s TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD- 3027, found online at [How to File a Program Discrimination Complaint](#) and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by:(1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov.

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.
