

3.1 FOREST MANAGEMENT AND WOODLAND PRODUCTS

This section describes Garfield County's plans, policies and programs for forests and woodland products. Additional information regarding forests and woodland resources is found in Section 2.6 Vegetation and Section 2.9 Wildland Fire Ecology and Management.

Introduction

Forests and woodland products are important natural resources in Garfield County. Approximately 40% of the Dixie National Forest's resources are located in Garfield County along with other significant forest and woodland resources located on the Fishlake National Forest, BLM lands and State Institutional Trust Lands. Forests and woodland products contribute to the quality of life by providing timber, forest products, water resources, open space, wildlife habitat, livestock forage, recreation, employment and numerous less tangible social and economic benefits.

Healthy forested lands, in particular, provide significant water resources that are the primary culinary and non-culinary water sources for communities in Garfield County. During the past few decades, conditions on Garfield County's forests and woodlands have deteriorated as traditional timber harvests have declined and as pinyon-juniper woodlands have encroached into sagebrush grasslands. The deteriorating conditions have left forests vulnerable to catastrophic fire and have greatly reduced the health and productivity of lands now occupied by encroaching Class II and Class III pinyon-juniper woodlands.

Current Setting

Garfield County has a great diversity of natural vegetation which is reflective of a broad range of environmental conditions. Different types of vegetation are associated with differences in elevation. Increasing elevation is associated with increasing precipitation and decreasing temperatures (both summer and winter). These strong environmental gradients result in zones of vegetation types ranging from hot/dry low elevation desert to cold/wet high elevation alpine communities. Southern Utah, like the rest of the Middle and Southern Rocky Mountain Region, has both lower and upper treelines (Long 1994). Below the lower treeline, conditions are generally too dry for trees to survive; above the upper treeline, conditions are generally too cold.

The lower forest/woodland vegetation type is comprised primarily of pinyon-juniper. Comprising approximately 69% of the forested lands in Garfield County, pinyon-juniper stands are the dominant woodland type in the County. The upper elevations are comprised of montane forest (i.e. Ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, Engelmann spruce, Aspen, etc.) and woodland forest types (i.e. Gamble oak, Mountain mahogany, intermountain maple).

Ownership and management of forests (including Pinyon-Juniper) in the County are dominated by the federal government (95% of total and 65.5% of the unreserved forest). Private ownership accounts for only 1.1% of the total montane forest and woodlands. About 49.3% or 1.6 million acres in Garfield County is forested. Pinyon-juniper woodlands constitute about 69% of the total forested area of Garfield County or approximately 1.1 million acres. Montane forests and

woodlands, excluding pinyon / juniper occupy about 0.49 million acres in the County. Of this area, 75.4% of forest land is further classified as higher productivity timberland with the potential to produce at least 20 cubic feet per acre per year. Nearly 14.9% of the total forest land within the County is located in some type of federal reserve (e.g., parks).

The montane forest and woodland vegetation occurring between the upper limit of the pinyon-juniper woodlands and upper treeline is depicted in Figure 1.

Garfield County Forest Resources Forest Cover

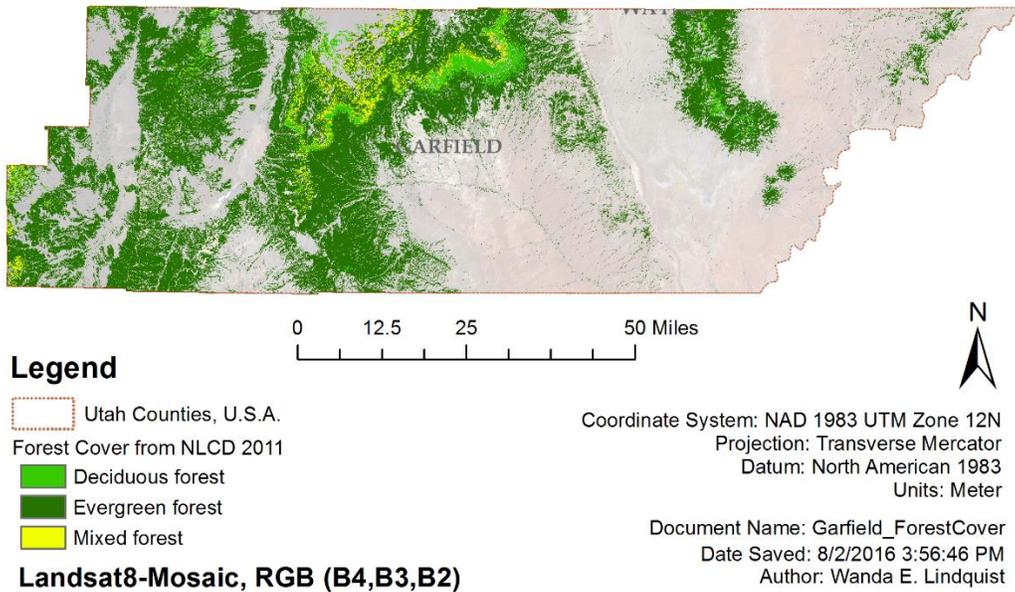


Figure 1. Forest cover in Garfield County from the National Land Cover Database 2011

Past successes in fire suppression and limitations of proactive forest management have resulted in widespread changes in forest structure and composition, particularly in the dry frequent-fire forest type. These forest changes, exacerbated by drought, are associated with fire regime change from frequent/low-severity fire to infrequent/high-severity and mixed-severity fire. In the Southwest and Intermountain West, the increase in the number of ‘mega-fires’ (uncharacteristically large and severe fires) is a region-wide problem. The 8000+ acre Shingle fire in 2012 in Kane County and the 70,000 + acre Brianhead fire in Iron and Garfield Counties during 2017 are indicative of substandard conditions of forests in southern Utah. The cost of the wildfire program in the US is enormous and growing. For the USDA Forest Service, which is

only one of the state and federal agencies responsible for wildland fire management, wildfire suppression has increased from 16% of the annual budget in 1995 to more than half in 2015. It is projected to reach 67% of the Forest Service's total annual budget in 10 years (USDA 2015). Traditional fire prevention and suppression approaches to wildland fire management are unsustainable in light of passive management and forest neglect.

Need for Management Change

- 1) Land managers need to implement aggressive, proactive management of forests and woodlands within their jurisdiction.
- 2) Land managers need to develop and maintain forests and woodlands that are resistant and resilient to fire.
- 3) Land managers need to use a wide variety of methods to achieve fire resistance and resilience including bullhogging, chaining, commercial timber harvests, and as a last resort prescribed fire.
- 4) In the case of wildfire, land managers need to recognize the authority of the County Sheriff and his responsibility to extinguish fires on public lands

Desired Future Conditions:

Garfield County desires:

- a) All forested lands in Garfield County are resistant and resilient to fire.
- b) Land managers implement aggressive, proactive management of forests within their jurisdiction.
- c) Land managers use the most effective method to achieve fire resistance and resilience including bull-hogging, chaining, thinning, commercial timber harvests, and as a last resort prescribed fire.
- d) Land managers provide a sustainable supply of a variety of commercial and non-commercial forest and woodland products.
- e) Commercial timber harvests are permitted while meeting other resource objectives.
- f) Commercial and non-commercial harvest of woodland products is maximized, consistent with forest health.
- g) Land managers recognize the authority of Garfield County's Sheriff to extinguish all wildfires on public lands in Garfield County.

Findings, Policies, Goals & Objectives

Finding: Forested lands are an important natural resource in Garfield County and contribute to the quality of life by providing employment, forest products, water resources, open space, wildlife habitat, recreation, and provide numerous other tangible and intangible social and economic benefits

Goal & Objective: Provide healthy forests and woodlands that are resistant and resilient to fire on all lands in Garfield County.

Goal & Objective: Provide a sustainable supply of a variety of commercial and non-commercial forest and woodland products on lands in Garfield County.

Goal & Objective: Manage forests and woodlands to maximize outdoor recreation, range, timber harvest, watershed, and fish and wildlife purposes, consistent with land health.

Goal & Objective: Proactively manage forests and woodlands to minimize potential for damage by fire and insects.

Finding: Garfield County finds that resistance and resilience to fire is best achieved when at least 8 million board feet per year are harvested from Garfield County forests and woodlands.

Policy When forest and woodland managers fail to harvest at least 8 million board feet of timber per year, lands in Garfield County are becoming susceptible to catastrophic fire.

Policy: When conducting land use plans and other pertinent NEPA analysis, land managers shall consider at least one alternative in detail that examines consequences of harvesting the agency's share of 8 million board feet per year based on the agency's proportion of forest/woodland acreage to the total forest/woodland acreage in Garfield County.

Policy: Reduce lands that are susceptible to catastrophic fire by 50% based on a 10 year rolling average.

Policy: Reduce municipal watersheds that are susceptible to catastrophic fire by 80% prior to the end of fiscal year 2025 and by 100% prior to the end of fiscal year 2030.

Policy: Permit commercial timber harvest to the maximum extent possible, consistent with forest health and while meeting other resource objectives.

Policy: Permit commercial and non-commercial harvest of woodland products (e.g. cedar posts, Christmas trees, fuel wood, and biomass utilization) to the maximum extent possible, consistent with forest health and while meeting other resource objectives.

Policy: Permit harvest of woodland products in riparian areas on a case by case basis if the activity can be conducted while maintaining or moving toward a properly functioning condition.

Policy: All Forest Management Plans and NEPA studies shall consider in detail at least one alternative that maximizes forest health through active forest management including aggressive timber harvesting.

Policy: All Forest Management Plans and NEPA studies shall consider in detail the social and economic impacts of at least one alternative that maximizes forest health through active forest management including aggressive timber harvesting.

Policy: Forest and woodland managers shall employ logging and mechanical thinning and as a last resort prescribed fire to keep forest canopies open to allow for forage production and to reduce high intensity canopy fires.

Policy: Forests and woodlands in Garfield County shall not be managed as wilderness or inventoried roadless areas without coordination with and the concurrence of the Garfield County Commission.

Policy: Garfield County supports the use of mechanical, chemical, biological, prescribed fire, or other proactive means to alter or perpetuate timber stands and increase herbaceous forage yield or cover as appropriate in areas where harvest methods are impractical or demand does not exist.

Policy: Garfield County adopts a no wildfire policy. All wildfires shall be extinguished in the most expedient manner possible. If forest and woodland managers desire improved resource conditions they shall implement active management techniques and shall not rely on wildfire.

Policy: Garfield County recognizes the Garfield County Sheriff as the chief law enforcement officer in Garfield County and his/her authority to extinguish all wildfires.