



Southern District Update

September 2022

By: Abigail Plecki, Southern District Forester at DFFM

Greetings all, my name is Abigail Plecki, Southern District Forester. I have been with the Department of Forestry and Fire Management (DFFM) since October 2021 and have been dedicated to reducing hazardous fuels and promoting healthy forest, grasslands, and our iconic desert ecosystems. Before this position, I graduated from Southern Illinois University- Carbondale with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry and a focus of Parks and Recreation, as well as a Master of Science in Forestry with a focus of Restoration Ecology. During my graduate research, I worked closely with the Sonoran Desert Museum personnel on community scale understanding of the buffelgrass invasion in Tucson. Now I have the opportunity to give back and continue to work with the constituency that helped me achieve my project goals.



Figure 1: Abigail in front of a historic cabin to be protected on our Keystone Peak Broadcast burn, just southwest of Tucson.

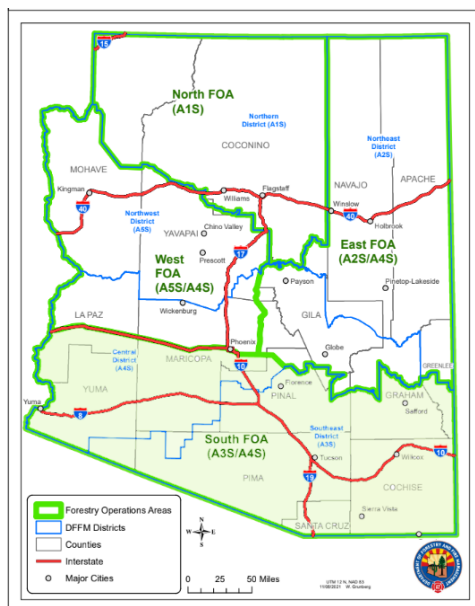


Figure 2: A map of DFFM Forestry Districts - the Southern District is highlighted in light green.

The southern district currently stretches from the greater Phoenix area to Yuma and along the US/Mexico border to Douglas, encompassing about 23 million acres. Within the past year, the focus for the southern district has been creating **Healthy Forest initiative (HFI)** projects. This recent funding source is awarded from the Governor to help prevent catastrophic wildfires across the state. Current HFI projects in the Southern District include **Gold Mountain** fuel break (Cave Creek), **Oracle State Park** fuel break (Oracle), **Turkey Run** firewise (Mt. Lemmon) and **Lebanon Reservoir** fuel break (Cactus Flats). In addition to HFI, starting **Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA)** projects with our federal partners has been another focus. That effort has created a number of projects including **Lost Dutchman** fuel break (Apache Junction), **Gila Watershed** fuel break (Safford), and **Juniper Flats** fuel break (Bisbee) which are all ongoing.

Supporting our sub-awarded project partners and newly outfitted Forestry Crews have been another focus for the Southern District. There are seven new sub-awarded projects throughout the south that will be funded through our HFI to help complete their fuels reduction work. Four of the five new forestry crews that were recently outfitted last April reside within the southern district; and engaging these crews with training and continual project work is the responsibility of the district.

DFFM is still expanding our capacity to get necessary work done! We are currently hiring another District Forester, Operations Forester and two Forestry Technicians to add in an additional district to better serve the constituency and our stakeholders. The vision is to re-align the forestry districts to match the five fire districts, directly affecting the southern district and splitting this large district into two. **If you or anyone you know would be interested in working for the State of Arizona please visit**

<https://www.azstatejobs.gov/jobs/search>.



Figure 3: Ft. Grant crew working to thin out the Juniper Flats project, which will protect the communication towers from future fire risk, located just northwest of Bisbee.