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FOREST LIFE

FALL 2021

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Pacific Forest Trust's mission is to sustain
America's forests for all their public
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people's well being, in cooperation with
private landowners and communities.

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PRESIDENT'S LETTER

The Time is Now



From fires to floods to the increasing cascade of species loss, the need to address climate change head-on and at scale has never been more urgent.

The evidence of its increasingly disastrous impact has never been clearer. We are witnessing the Earth's, and our, basic support systems — such as the forests that supply us with clean water, air, and a wealth of other benefits — being torn apart.

We know that forest loss and degradation is the second largest source of CO₂ emissions. It's not just a tropical forest problem: CO₂ emissions from forest disturbance is the single largest cause of emissions in Oregon, and a major source in other states as well. We are on an emissions pathway far accelerated from the IPCC's (Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change) worst-case projections.

We know we need transformational action in order to avoid the far worse impacts of climate change — the question is whether we are proactive in initiating those transformations, or if they are forced upon us by inaction. We can continue doing what we have done, and see the same results, or we can thoughtfully and radically change direction.

In many cases we know what we need to do. Perhaps the ripest of the “low-hanging fruit” we can seize lies in managing our forests for enduring outcomes. Quite simply, we must transform our forest management construct from one that “produces” climate, water, and biodiversity services as by-products of a timber or fiber focus to one that produces those critical services as the primary goal, with timber and fiber as the by-products. Our forests are irreplaceable as natural climate solutions — not simply as carbon sinks, but for all their climate adaptation services: water production, treasure houses of biodiversity, and well-springs of human renewal and inspiration. There are no substitutes.

We must make it more financially rewarding to keep and manage forests for their many and manifest climate benefits than to simplify, degrade, and lose them to production of conventional timber products and development. We also need to invest at the required scale to restore public lands to a vibrant, resilient state. In the words of PFT Board member Jack Stephenson, if we don't do this, it's “game over”. For, even if we could wave a magic wand and stop all fossil fuels emissions

today, we'd still have our second largest emissions source pumping far more CO2 into the atmosphere than what we must take out to have a safe climate for our children.

And our children know this.

This is not an argument to stop cutting trees. It is an imperative to start managing for whole forests, and to cut trees in ways and for purposes that restore and enhance natural forest function. Our focus must be on restoring more natural, older forest conditions that are far more resilient to climate change stress, and vastly more carbon-rich.

Older, bigger trees in more natural forest stands survive fire, pests, and drought more successfully than crowded young plantations. Older, more natural forests store more water longer, reduce floods, and release water later into summer than do young plantations. Older trees and stands store vastly more carbon than do young trees and stands. And older, more natural forests support more natural biodiversity than do young plantations.

For fire safety, this transformation needs to be at the large, landscape scale. Forests in much of the US, and especially in the West, are fire-adapted. They co-evolved with fire. Restoring them to a naturally fire resilient state will entail both more cutting (although differently than we do now) and more burning (also differently than we do now). We need large landscapes that we can "let burn," differently, at low intensities, while we focus fire suppression efforts around homes and communities.

This will take investments at a vastly different scale than we have traditionally done. We need to move to investing billions of dollars annually in proactively restoring and conserving our forests, rather than spending those billions of dollars a year, every year, in fighting and remediating disasters.

Some states are stepping up to face the enormous challenge, as is our nation. California has just passed a budget with an unprecedented \$7 billion allocated to fight climate change, including almost \$3.5 billion in investments in forests and other nature-based climate solutions. Oregon has issued a compelling call for action in the report of the Oregon Global Warming Commission.

The US nationally is also stepping up again. As you read this, the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will have just met in Glasgow, Scotland. PFT will



California's 2021 budget has an unprecedented **\$7 billion** allocated to fight climate change.



40%

**40% of emissions
reductions must
come from forests.**

attend as an accredited observer, focusing on enhancing understanding of the vital role forest conservation and stewardship must play in meeting our shared global challenge — as we have for over 15 years.

Both to avert massive species loss and to address climate, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsak has also issued his agency a challenge to review its programs, like the Forest Legacy Program, to see how they can step up their game where forest loss is most significant — private lands.

Leveraging the climate-healing power of forests is fundamental to any hope of reducing the risks of climate change, as 40% of the climate solution comes from conserving forests, improving their management, and focusing on supporting how forests function naturally.

Forests are a core and critical part of the solution. We cannot save the planet at the pace and scale we have acted on to date. This is the challenge of our time, and we must rise to it.

MEET BOARD MEMBER JACK STEPHENSON

Jack Stephenson joined the Board of Pacific Forest Trust in 2019. A passionate conservationist with a career in tech and with McKinsey & Company, Jack is now dedicating his life to the challenge of climate change.

Why are forests important to you?

I grew up in Montana and my father was a huge outdoorsman. We spent much of our free time out in nature. We are a family of committed conservationists! In my professional career, I've focused a good deal on climate change. I see a huge untapped opportunity to fight global warming by protecting, restoring, and better managing forests.

What do you find most rewarding about PFT's work?

I joined PFT's Board because Pacific Forest Trust is about as deep on forests as any organization I've ever known. PFT is doing truly cutting-edge work and punches well above its weight. I view PFT as a brain trust on a wide range of issues. Also, California is way ahead of the rest of the country on climate action, thanks, in part, to PFT.

What do you feel to be the greatest challenge for conservation over the coming decade?

Climate change. Even in the most pristine areas, global warming has thrown things totally out of whack. Add in human destruction and degradation of critical ecosystems, we are in really dire shape. We can take fossil fuels emissions to zero, but if we don't protect nature, it's game over.

What opportunity does PFT have to help address our climate crisis?

Climate change is the biggest challenge mankind has ever faced. PFT is a master of bringing competing stakeholders together to conserve forests, increase forest carbon stocks, protect critical ecosystem services like water and wildlife, and make forests much more resilient to a warming climate.

A NEW DEMONSTRATION FOREST

Conserving Mount Ashland, Managing for Climate Resistance

PFT is in the midst of an exciting, ambitious effort to acquire, protect, and restore a stunningly diverse forest on the slopes of Mount Ashland, building on decades of conservation work along the Siskiyou Crest.

Southern Oregon's Siskiyou region is home to highly biodiverse, globally important lands, as recognised by the Cascade Siskiyou National Monument (CSNM). The lands surrounding the CSNM, especially to the west, have an extraordinarily diverse suite of habitats as well, changing as the elevation, soils, and aspect change. Conserving and connecting the span of the Siskiyou Crest is a long-term goal for PFT, ensuring that this amazing array of plants and wildlife have an unbroken, connected safe passage from east to west, and north to south, crossing public and private lands. With advancing climate change warming the region, this mid-elevation forest is even more important as a refuge for myriad species on the move.

In 2020, PFT entered into an agreement with Chinook Forest Partners to purchase this highly diverse forestland along the Siskiyou Crest, along with another 555 adjacent acres. (We conserved that 555 acres at the end 2020.) We are now raising funds to complete the acquisition of the remaining 1,120 acres. (We thank the Resilient Lands Program of the Oregon Community Foundation and the Land Trust Alliance for an initial grant helping fund this purchase!) Acquiring this property will significantly expand the conserved corridor from the CSNM to the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest.

Restoring and managing the property's forest, meadows, and woodlands will help them be more resilient to wildfires. As the devastating 2020 Almeda Fire illustrated, this area is fire prone and at high risk of increased fire with climate change. We will be managing for "good fire" to mitigate that risk, including the use of cultural burning. This and other Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) approaches can help restore forests to a more climate adaptive, resilient state.



**PFT agreed to buy
1,120 acres on
Mt. Ashland from
Chinook Forest
Partners.**

Restoring more natural forest function and resilience also benefits the great biodiversity and water resources. The forest hosts a rich array of habitats supporting northern spotted owl, Coho salmon, and gray wolf — all listed under the Endangered Species Act. Dozens more rare or imperiled species such as the Humboldt marten, Pacific fisher, western pond turtle, and northern goshawk also benefit. Its cold-water springs feed wet meadows and creeks, including Neil Creek, benefitting Ashland's watershed, as well as its viewshed.

With our “forever” approach managing this demonstration forest, we have the opportunity to provide sustainable forest-based jobs, learning opportunities, and partnerships with a range of diverse stakeholders. We look forward to sharing more exciting news with you as we reach our goal of acquiring and stewarding the Mt. Ashland Forest!

If you'd like to help, please contact Glenn Fee at gfee@pacificforest.org



The Mt. Ashland Forest has rare old growth resources important for people and wildlife.



MEET OUR SUMMER INTERN COURT BALLINGER

Undeterred by extreme heat, poor air quality, or steep terrain, Court Ballinger (pictured above) spent his summer as a PFT intern working in the Klamath Siskiyou Mountains to help Pacific Forest Trust prepare for the stewardship of the 1,120-acre Mount Ashland Forest. Court, a senior at Oregon State University's School of Forestry, was interested in gaining practical field experience in forest management planning, and this internship was perfectly suited for that!

Almost all of Court's time was spent in the field, learning about and documenting the unique forests, meadows, riparian habitats, and other features that help illustrate why this ecoregion is a globally significant biodiversity hotspot. Jack Singer, Stewardship Associate at PFT, supervised and trained Court to observe and document key aspects of the property that will inform PFT's plans for restoration and management activities as the future owners of this remarkable place. All his hard work resulted in an inventory of the property's roads, documentation of invasive plants, fish habitat surveys, and descriptions of current conditions across the property's many meadows, springs, riparian areas, and other diverse habitats.

Court set quite a model for intern savvy, perseverance, and dedication!

Lightning Canyon Ranch Conserved Forever

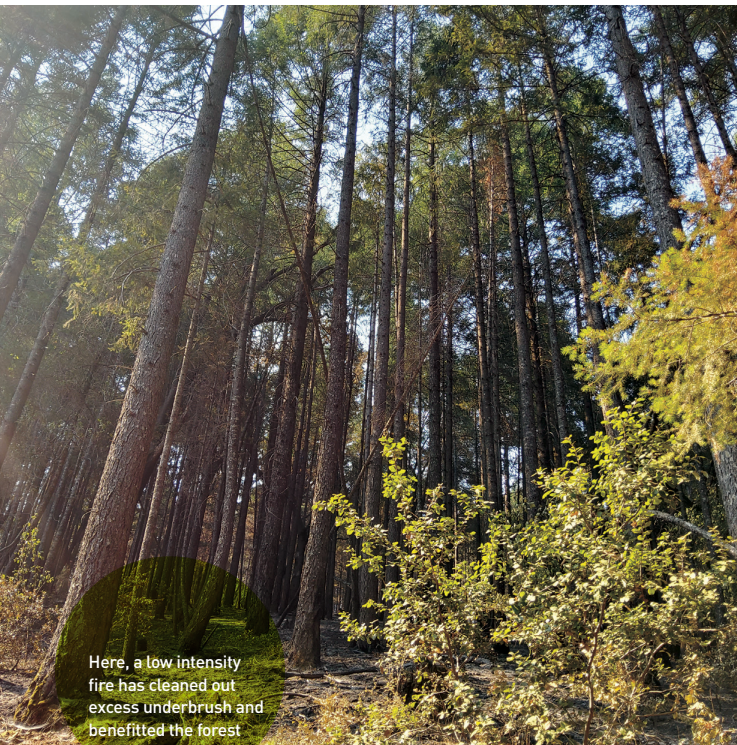
Thanks to the generosity of Bob and Cassie Hixon, together with funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board's Climate Adaptation and Resilience Program, the 2,098-acre Lightning Canyon Ranch was permanently conserved early this summer with the Pacific Forest Trust.

This extraordinary property lies to the east of Interstate 5, between the Sacramento and McCloud River arms of Shasta Lake, in the Whiskeytown-Shasta-Trinity National Recreation Area. Encompassing the summit and slopes of Sacramento Mountain, 16 miles of creeks flow through it into the Salt Creek inlet of Lake Shasta. Given the great diversity of elevation and aspect, as well as ample water resources, this forest is rich in biodiversity and strategically located as a "best bet" for wildlife habitat resilience as California's climate changes.

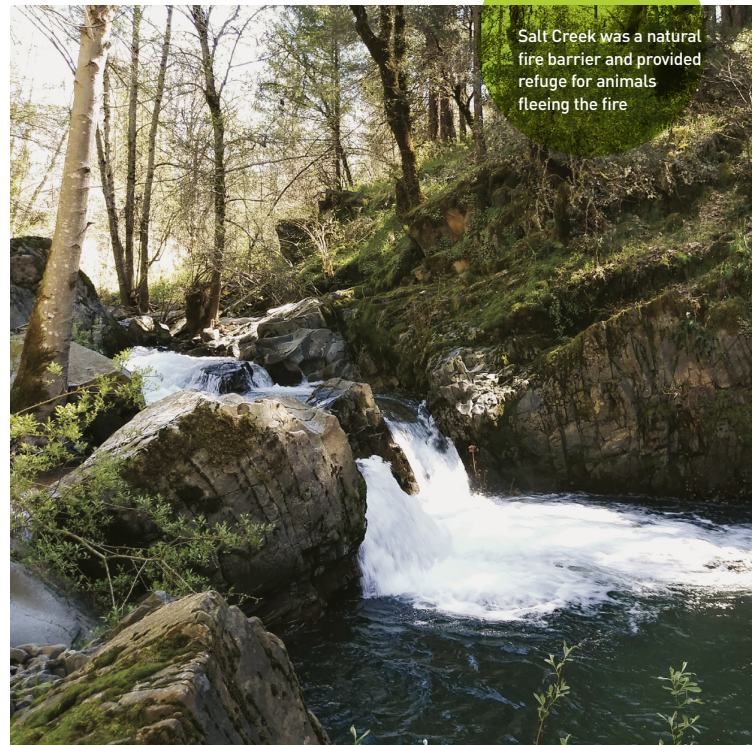
That resilience was just tested by the Salt Fire, which started near I-5 and burned through the property just after the conservation easement was granted. As fire is a natural part of California's forest ecosystems, we know that it isn't a matter of *if* a conserved property will burn, but *when and how*. As a result, management for resilience is built into every conservation easement we craft with our partners.

“We know nature will heal itself, and, with time, Lightning Canyon's habitats will be even richer. After all, nature is dynamic and so is conservation.”

— Bob Hixon



Here, a low intensity fire has cleaned out excess underbrush and benefitted the forest



Salt Creek was a natural fire barrier and provided refuge for animals fleeing the fire

As the Salt Fire burned, we conferred with the Hixons and their forester, Bob Hutcheson of Black Fox Timber Management, to assess its impact, and to support their planning for habitat restoration.

Our first step was to do a post-fire assessment, and the photos here help tell the story of “before” and “after” this fire. Fires burn at varying intensities and with different impacts to vegetation and habitats. Low to middle intensity fire is actually a great benefit for many forest ecosystems. Such fires reduce excess fuels like small young understory trees and shrubs that have built up after a century of fire suppression. Plants that depend on fire are rejuvenated and flourish. Many trees recover from fire — oaks and older conifers with thick bark often survive as they are adapted to this fire regime. (Even dead trees nourish the soil and provide

habitat for rare species like the threatened black-backed woodpecker.) At Lightning Canyon, in places where the fire burned very hot, chaparral species will come back quickly, and some conifer stands will be logged, creating new gaps with grass and shrubs that deer and other species need, and some areas will be replanted to restore conifers more quickly.

“We were all excited to have Lightning Canyon finally protected for the future, and then the Salt Fire struck! I think of the families nearby that lost their homes, and of the beautiful forest in flames,” Bob recalled. “But, within a week, deer and black bear were back eating the acorns that had fallen. Now there are fresh sprigs of green coming up. We know nature will heal itself, and, with time, Lightning Canyon’s habitats will be even richer. After all, nature is dynamic and so is conservation.”



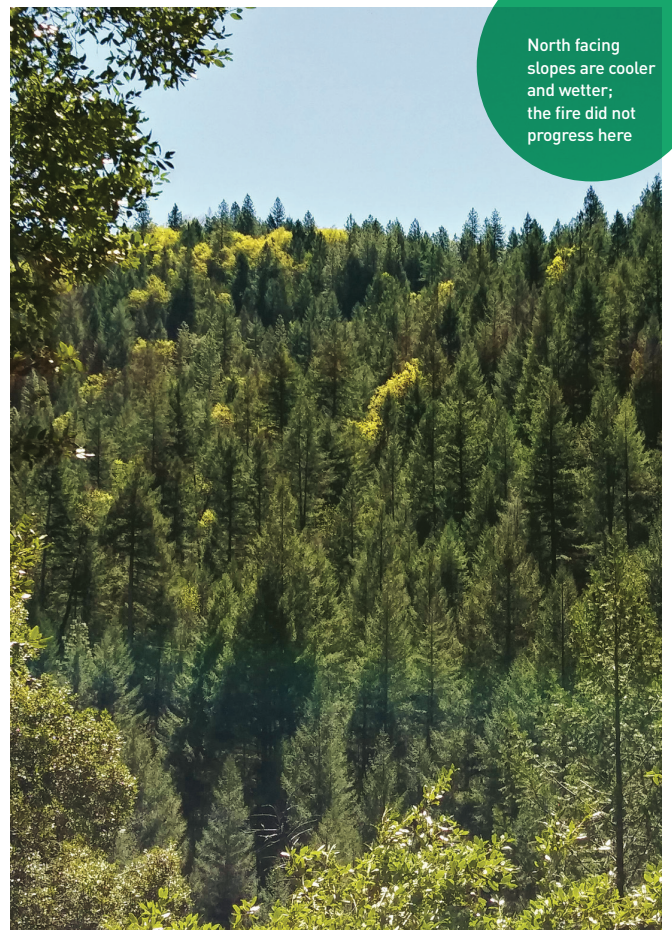
South facing slopes with chapparal burned hotter. Note buildings in the distance where the Wildland Urban Interface is invading the slopes surrounding Shasta Lake. Lightning Canyon Ranch prevents such dangerous increasing WUI development



In mixed habitats, larger trees survived well, while more burnable chapparal was cleared out



On eastern slopes with more exposure, conifer forest burned more, but older trees with thicker bark fared better



North facing slopes are cooler and wetter; the fire did not progress here

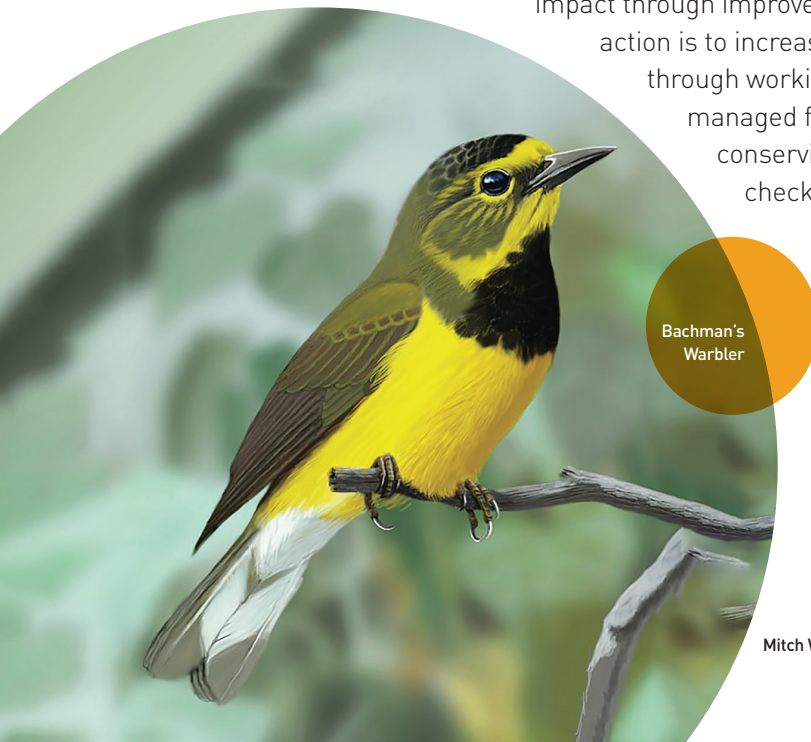
SPECIES EXTINCTION

America the Beautiful or America the Vanishing?

What is the value of a Bachman's warbler? Last seen in 1988, this beautiful black and yellow forest bird of the southeastern US is now extinct due to habitat loss. It is one of 23 new species that the US declared extinct this October.

There are over a million species at risk of extinction globally — no such collapse has been seen since the age of the dinosaurs. That extraordinary extinction we could blame on a meteor. But now, people are the driving force of extinction. It's estimated that the US has over 650 extinct species. Thousands more are known to be at risk of extinction.

To combat this, the US has stepped up with its America the Beautiful, or 30x30, initiative to conserve 30% of our lands and waters by 2030. California has also launched a 30x30 initiative and is putting some significant funding behind it in the state's 2021 budget. Nationally, the Biden Administration is seeking to fulfill this goal with existing programs in many cases, both increasing their funding and their impact through improvements in implementation. One such common-sense action is to increase voluntary conservation on private lands, especially through working lands conservation easements that ensure well-managed forests. This is a vital, proven, and efficient tool for conserving forest habitats, especially when private lands are checkerboarded with federal lands, as in much of the West.



Bachman's
Warbler



Many landowners committed to conserving and stewarding their forests prefer to work with accredited land trusts to ensure future generations enjoy the beauty and solace lands offer

Conserving habitats at the landscape scale — which many species need, especially with climate change — requires working collaboratively with willing landowners. President Biden has called upon federal agencies to reexamine current policies to see how cooperation with private landowners can be improved. Agriculture Secretary Vilsak echoed this in his comments on increasing voluntary private lands conservation after the inaugural meeting in August of the Interagency Working Group charged with carrying out 30x30.

Working Forest Conservation Easements, such as those acquired and stewarded by PFT and other land trusts, are an elegant tool to achieve these and other Administration goals, such as increasing climate adaptation. Congressman Jared Huffman (CA) and a number of other federal lawmakers have specifically urged Secretary Vilsak to increase the protection of

private working forests through a minor change to the USDA Forest Legacy Program (FLP). They are urging the Secretary to allow accredited land trusts to work with states to hold the conservation interests acquired with help from the FLP.

This would increase the reach and scope of the program, as many landowners don't want to expand governmental control of their land but are willing and committed to conserving and stewarding their lands with non-governmental partner land trusts. This minor change would also leverage FLP dollars by bringing in more private support, decreasing long-term costs for governments and increasing compatibility with state funded forest conservation programs. This is a sensible, locally-driven, low-cost yet high impact action that would significantly accelerate saving our wildlife heritage for future generations.

Diverse Voices Join to Support Resilient Forests and Communities

California's massive fires of 2017–2021 illustrated the need for a new approach to improve fire safety and resilience in both forests and communities.

20M



California needs to restore over
20 million acres of forest to make
our landscapes safe for “good fire”.

Those fires also illustrated that many impacted stakeholders and communities were not at the policy table driving responses and solutions, often lacking those most impacted by wildfire, smoke, and the extreme heat of fire weather. So, in 2020, PFT significantly broadened its outreach to a number of those stakeholders to build a stronger suite of voices speaking to the needs for both a new approach to, and increased investment in, building resilience into communities and forest landscapes to reduce fire risk.

Since then, PFT has been working with and convening a diverse group of new voices — including Tribes, environmental justice groups, public health advocates, ranchers, agricultural groups, and regional governmental entities. These add to the strong, more traditional, fire management voices of scientists, conservationists, and land managers working to identify needs, coordinate efforts, and advance a suite of shared priorities to improve fire policy.

Recommended actions to improve wildfire behavior included restoring more natural resilience to forests and landscapes, conserving large landscapes where fire itself can naturally maintain a lower risk condition, mitigating impacts of intense smoke and heat on outdoor workers and people who cannot escape smoke impacts in their own homes, and home hardening for unsafe housing.



California needs to restore over 20 million acres of forest to make our landscapes safe for "good fire".

Cultural Fire Management Council

Both traditional fire management tools, like mechanical thinning and, importantly, new tools, such as the use of "good fire" — both prescribed and cultural — were identified as key actions.

And, in September, we saw the results of this expanded coalition work. California made major investments consistent with our priorities. Combined with the early budget investments, there is now roughly \$1.5 billion for forest improvement programs, prescribed burning, protecting communities, and "hardening" homes. Additional investments were made for community resilience centers providing refuge from smoke and heat, and funding to help seal homes to exclude smoke and heat.

Our broad-based push to expand the use of prescribed and cultural fire had other big wins, including legislation to reduce burner liability for those rare case where a well-conducted, permitted burn by a licensed burn-boss, or cultural fire by a tribal burner, becomes a wildfire. And a new state-backed Prescribed Fire Claims Fund makes fire insurance more affordable and available. These actions remove obstacles to using "good fire", which is a less expensive and more effective approach to reducing broad fire risk and restoring resilience than fire suppression alone.

This diverse coalition has advanced real gains and historic investments; PFT is committed to supporting and expanding the coalition.

2020 in Brief

2020 was a memorable, tumultuous year for so many reasons — fires and COVID are but two! Despite that, we were able to make major progress on many fronts. Here are several of them:

1 Conserving Mountcrest East. In 2020, PFT was honored to work with the redoubtable Jud Parsons to acquire and conserve another 571 acres on the Siskiyou Crests adjacent to his already conserved Mountcrest Forest, creating a protected block of almost 2,500 well-managed forest acres.

2 Launching the Trinity Headwaters Project. A very exciting new project in 2020 is to acquire and conserve the 11,000-acre Trinity Headwaters. Containing 9% of the headwaters of the Trinity River, our goal is to buy it from the MichiCal Timber Company and convey it to the Watershed Research and Training Center, who will manage it for multiple community and ecological benefits.

3 Contributing to “Solving the Climate Crisis”. PFT advocacy for forests and land was included in the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis report “Solving the Climate Crisis: The Congressional Action Plan for a Clean Energy Economy and a Healthy, Resilient, and Just America”, including the forest carbon reserve, tax incentives and procurement recommendations.

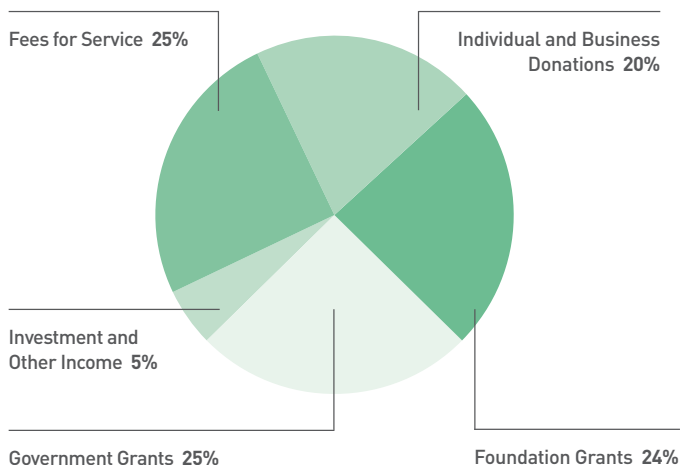
4 Building Coalitions for Fire Safe Communities and Forests. 2020 was a year of horrendous fires that illustrated vividly the impacts of unnatural fire on human health and our environment. PFT launched a new coalition effort bringing together diverse voices and perspectives on the issue to advocate for great investment in managing fire differently, and getting “good fire” back on the landscape.



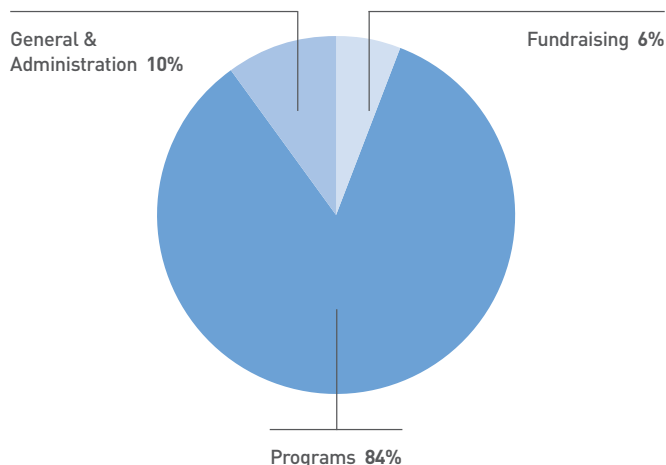
Working with Jud Parsons to conserve Mountcrest East

Launching the Trinity Headwaters Project

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“PFT is doing truly cutting-edge work and punches well above its weight.”

— Jack Stephenson,
PFT Board Member

Front cover: A magnificent old growth Incense Cedar on the Mount Ashland Forest (see p. 5)

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