



# Forest Stewardship Plan 2025



# Foreword

Big Sky's forests are iconic, yet growing human pressures—expanding development, increased recreation, rising water demand, fire suppression, and the spread of invasive species—are placing new stress on ecosystem health, wildlife habitat, and community safety. These pressures also heighten wildfire risk, which in turn threatens homeowners' insurance availability and creates real implications for our real-estate and business community. Meeting these challenges requires coordinated, community-wide stewardship.

This plan provides the roadmap—clear, actionable, and built for collaboration. With your support, we can put it into motion and ensure a more resilient future for Big Sky.

"The environment is  
where we all meet;  
where we all have a  
mutual interest; it is the  
one thing all of us share."  
— Lady Bird Johnson



# Goals, Deliverables & Benefits

## **Primary Goals:**

- Identify primary risk factors to the forests and wildlife in the Big Sky area.
- Establish an understanding of Big Sky's community forestry, wildlife habitat, and landscape resilience needs.
- Define a clear, achievable Community Forester role that integrates desired forest conditions, wildfire preparedness, and favorable land stewardship.
- Develop a comprehensive plan that unites past efforts, identifies capacity gaps, and provides actionable next steps.

## **End Product Deliverables & Benefits:**

- Comprehensive Forest Stewardship Plan: Development of one document compiling existing forest-related plans, identifying needs, and outlining implementation strategies.
- Defined Community Forester Role: Development of the scope, structure, and job description tailored to Big Sky's landscape.
- Geographic Information Systems (GIS) database: Development and utilization of data to provide analysis at various spatial scales for all relevant resources across all land ownerships. Use GIS to provide landowners and the Big Sky community detailed maps of planned activities and outcomes that keeps the community informed.
- Long-Term Monitoring Plan: Development and implementation of a forest conditions monitoring process using best technologies and accepted protocols. This process is modified as needed based on monitoring results.
- Community & Partner Engagement Framework: Development and implementation of a clear process for coordination and communication with partners and the community of Big Sky.
- Identify landscape and forest factors that could affect the impact from wildfire.

## **Tangible Long-Term Benefits:**

- Achieve Firewise USA and Tree City USA certifications for Big Sky to enhance community recognition of its commitment to conservation.
- Improved homeowners insurance retention through proactive risk-mitigation efforts.
- Centralized natural resource conservation support for landowners, HOAs, and developers.
- Enhanced collaboration among fire, conservation, and development partners.
- Improved forest resilience and safer egress routes through coordinated management.
- Potential for local biomass utilization projects that support sustainability and energy resilience.
- Coordinated strategies for evacuations related to wildfires or other emergencies.

# Purpose of this Plan

Establish a shared understanding of community forestry needs, wildlife and habitat priorities, and existing capacity gaps. Define a realistic scope, structure, and service model for a Community Forester role tailored to Big Sky's unique location, and recommend an implementation roadmap that supports long-term community and natural resource resilience.

## Community Needs & Priority Assessment

### **Landscape & Environmental Context**

Big Sky's mixed-conifer forests and developed landscapes form important wildlife corridors and seasonal habitats. These areas face increasing pressures from:

- Development and habitat fragmentation
  - Invasive species and landscaping with non-native species.
  - Post-project restoration and slope stabilization needs
  - Balancing recreation and natural resource protection
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### **Current Gaps in Services**

- No central forestry/wildlife liaison for private landowners.
  - Limited coordination among fire, conservation, and development entities.
  - Lack of consistent standards for post development restoration and fuels management.
  - Limited vetted contractors trained in both fire and general natural resources management objectives.
  - Minimal community education on forest vegetation management, particularly as it relates to wildfire protection and the overall stewardship of natural resources.
  - Untapped potential for biomass/timber utilization and renewable energy applications.
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### **Stakeholder & Community Input Process**

Recommended activities include:

- Interviews with key partners (e.g., Big Sky Fire Department, Big Sky Owners Association, Gallatin & Madison Counties, Resort Tax, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks, Custer Gallatin National Forest (USFS), Extension Forestry, Realtors, Developers, HOA's, Land Trusts, Big Sky Resort, local nonprofits, and others).
- Landowner listening sessions and surveys to identify top concerns (insurance, wildfire, insects, habitat, aesthetics).
- Review and integration of existing plans (e.g., 2011 Forest Stewardship Plan, CWPP, Resort Tax's Our Big Sky vision).
- GIS mapping of forest zones at high risk to wildfires and areas of important natural resources.
- Summary of community priorities into an actionable needs framework.



# Identified Community Priorities

## High Priorities

### **Wildfire Risk & Forest Health**

- Fuels reduction and defensible space guidance.
- Insect, disease, and hazard tree identification and recommended actions.
- Promoting resilient and diverse forests based on landowner objectives.

### **Wildlife Habitat Stewardship**

- Integrate habitat goals into fuels and forest work (retain snags, woody debris).
- Use native plants in restoration for cover and forage.
- Maintain wildlife movement through developed areas.

### **Landowner Support & Education**

- Site visits combining forest, fire, general natural resource and wildlife habitat advice.
- Workshops and outreach on resource-friendly forestry.
- Promote and coordinate collaborative projects across property boundaries to achieve broader, landscape-scale stewardship.

### **Community Coordination**

- Coordinate efforts among local fire, forestry, and conservation organizations.
- Share best management practices with developers, builders, and landowners.



## Secondary Priorities

- Invasive species identification and control.
- Native plant guidance for revegetation and erosion control.
- Participation in recreation/trail planning to reduce habitat disturbance.
- Biomass and timber utilization.

## Outside Scope (Partnership-Dependent)

- Wildlife surveys requiring permits.
- Advanced research or modeling.

# Recommended Role Scope & Structure

## Position Purpose

Serve as Big Sky's central forestry and habitat resource—supporting resilient forests, reducing wildfire risk, and maintaining the ecological integrity that sustains wildlife and the community.

## Structural Recommendations

### Host Organization

Grow Wild, in partnership with fire, conservation, and planning entities.

### Service Model

On-site consultations, workshops, technical guidance.

### Seasonality

April-October (field), November-March (education and planning).

### Key Partners

Big Sky Fire Department, Gallatin & Madison Counties, Resort Tax, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, Custer Gallatin National Forest (USFS), Extension Forestry, Realtors, Developers, local nonprofits, and other local developers, homeowners associations, and conservation groups.



# Proposed Scope of Work

## **Forest & Habitat Health Monitoring**

Assess forest conditions; identify disease, insect, and hazard-tree issues, etc.; recommend and develop projects plans that attain desired conditions.

## **Wildfire Risk Reduction**

Plan defensible-space and fuel-reduction projects that balance safety with natural-resource values; recommend fire-resistant native plants; support CWPP updates; and promote fuel-reduction projects across property lines to strengthen community-wide resilience.

## **Landowner Education & Engagement**

Offer site consultations, workshops, and online materials; support and implement volunteer projects.

## **Invasive Species & Native Plant Support**

Identify and manage invasive plants; promote native re-vegetation for protection of natural resources.

## **Climate & Resilience Planning**

Encourage species diversity, adaptive planting, and resilience strategies.

## **Partnerships & Coordination**

Convene coordination meetings, share data, and support development that minimizes habitat fragmentation.

## **Outside Scope**

Excludes prescribed fire, law enforcement, and wildlife research requiring permits.



# Implementation Roadmap

Phase	Timeline	Key Tasks
Planning & Position Development	0-12 months	Conduct needs assessment; finalize plan and job description; secure funding; formalize MOUs.
Program Startup	12-24 months	Hire forester; launch pilot site visits and workshops; establish reporting templates.
Full Implementation & Evaluation	Year 2+	Conduct annual reporting; integrate wildlife data; pursue sustained funding.

## Budget & Funding Considerations

- Salary and benefits for a professional forester.
- Vehicle and field expenses.
- Supplies, equipment, and office space.
- Education and outreach materials.
- Training and professional development.
- Administrative and data management support.

## Evaluation & Indicators of Success

- Number of landowner consultations completed.
- Acres of forest or fuels treated.
- Acres or linear feet of habitat restored or enhanced.
- Number of workshops and community participants.
- Partner satisfaction and collaboration metrics.
- Adoption of fire-wise and resource-friendly practices by landowners.