



# Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project Biannual Report July – December 2017



## **BACKGROUND**

In November 2012, City voters overwhelmingly approved (74%) the \$10 million-dollar Flagstaff Watershed Protection Project (FWPP). This forest treatment effort, involving city, state, and federal lands, is designed to reduce the risk of severe wildfire and subsequent post-fire flooding in the Rio de Flag (Dry Lake Hills) and Upper Lake Mary (Mormon Mountain) watersheds. This report highlights significant accomplishments from July – December 2017.

## **FWPP CELEBRATES 5 YEARS**



Over the past five years, crews and contractors have mobilized to implement fuels reduction treatments on nearly 4,500 acres throughout the project footprint, including Observatory Mesa, state lands within the City and on federal land in Dry Lake Hills. To celebrate the project's 5-year milestone, Mother Road Brewery created a special batch of "FWPP watershed beer" and tapped it at an anniversary event. This represented a special partnership between a local business that uses mostly water for its products and an initiative aimed at preserving critical watersheds and the community's water supply. Mike Elson, Flagstaff district ranger, reflected by saying, "FWPP at its core is a community project. It's a truly collaborative community approach to a challenge we are all facing together. That's why we have reason to celebrate, and it's why we are seen as a model for so many other communities to consider."

*Mother Road proudly serves  
FWPP watershed beer*

## **ON THE GROUND WORK**

Forest treatments that consists of tree thinning in the Dry Lake Hills are being implemented in two phases. Phase I, with some progress made this summer, is focused on the lower slopes of the Dry Lake Hills/Mt Elden. The Phase I contract for harvesting approximately 650 acres was terminated when the contractor failed to accomplish the work in the specified timeframe. The contract will be re-offered and is expected to be awarded within 60 days. Phase II includes the steeper terrain of the Dry Lake Hills, which requires specialized logging equipment. Multiple contracts are expected to be awarded in summer 2018. Due to the limited availability of the specialized equipment, work on the steepest areas is not expected until May 2019. Treatments south of Schultz Tank, in areas that are not as steep, are expected to begin summer 2018. On City lands, the last of mechanical thinning that was planned for Observatory Mesa (384 acres) was completed. In addition, 225 acres of previously harvested areas on the Mesa were broadcast burned, hand thinning will continue through next year and slash piles from prior thinning treatments will be burned as conditions allow.



*Log Trucks on Observatory Mesa*

## **OUTREACH**

FWPP presented to several professional groups and organizations. This included a field tour with forestry professionals who attended the 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of Science and Management on the Colorado Plateau. In addition, we hosted another field tour and shared our experiences with Northern Arizona University's (NAU) Ecological Restoration class. We also held three events during the community's Festival of Science week in September. FWPP also hosted a Science on Tap event at The Green Room, which focused on monitoring the project's effects to forest treatments. FWPP led a tour with NAU School of Forestry's Advisory Committee in the Dry Lake Hills project area. Lastly, a representative presented at the Society of American Foresters conference in Albuquerque, New Mexico.



*School of Forestry's Advisory Committee Field Tour*

## **MONITORING**



*Recently installed Schultz Creek hydrologic station*

The City Monitoring Plan, a community-driven strategy, contains four capacity monitoring frameworks: 1) Fire Behavior, 2) Hydrologic Response, 3) Socioeconomic, and 4) Other Ongoing/Potential Monitoring Projects. The FWPP Monitoring Plan is being updated and will be finalized next spring. The City's Utilities Department completed installation of three hydrologic monitoring stations that consists of precipitation gauges and stream flow transducers. Two stations are located in the lower portions of in the Dry Lake Hills and the third is located on the steeper slopes. These stations are some of the first hydrologic instrumentation in the area, which will be used to assess the effects of precipitation amounts to stream flow and occurrence of extreme weather events in the area. In addition, we engaged students from NAU's School of Forestry to conduct field surveys that will aid efforts documenting changes in treated areas.

## **FWPP "IN THE NEWS"**

FWPP was featured in a series of three stories published in the *Payson Round-Up*: "[Can we save ourselves?](#)" "[Chapter 21 - Faced with Catastrophe, Flagstaff Took Action;](#)" and "[Flagstaff pays a little now to prevent billion dollar disaster.](#)"

## **FINANCIAL INVESTMENT AND LEVERAGED FUNDS**

To date, through cash or in-kind service contributions, partners have provided slightly over \$4 million to the project; this is over and above the City's \$10 million commitment. The bulk of this additional investment has come from the Forest Service, but 13 other partners have also contributed to the project, demonstrating the widespread financial support the project has received.

## **SUMMARY**

We continue to make steady progress and are committed to the goals of reducing the threat of severe fire and potential post-fire flooding, while enhancing community well-being. Thank you for your continued support!