

ANNUAL REPORT | 2024



TEXAS A&M

FOREST SERVICE



1 CONSERVE.

- 2 **CONSERVATION** BY THE NUMBERS
- 3 Impact of the Forest Sector, Landowner Assistance
- 5 Celebrations Commence State Forest Centennial Year

7 PROTECT.

- 8 **PROTECTION** BY THE NUMBERS
- 9 Panhandle Wildfires
- 11 Law Enforcement Officers Protect Texans
from Timber Theft and Investigate Wildfires

13 LEAD.

- 14 **LEADERSHIP** BY THE NUMBERS
- 15 Community Forestry Grants
- 17 Bolstering Statewide Firefighting Capacity and Preparedness

 **TEXAS A&M**
FOREST SERVICE

REFLECTIONS

FROM THE DIRECTOR

2024 was certainly a busy year for the Agency, characterized by *CHANGE, CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES* and *NOTABLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS*. As I reflect on the past year, my thoughts and empathy are again focused on the citizens of the Texas Panhandle who endured the largest wildland fire in recorded Texas history. We will continue to assist and partner with those courageous first responders and resilient Texans as they continue to recover and recreate life as it was prior to February 26, 2024.

We understand the importance of transparency and accountability in public service. This report serves as a testament to our commitment to responsible stewardship of taxpayer resources and our unwavering dedication to the well-being of the Texans we serve. Throughout the year, we have worked to conserve and protect the landscapes, forests and natural resources of Texas, augmented by our leadership in providing technical assistance to landowners, engaging our extensive network of cooperators and our conservation education initiatives. In doing so, we directly and indirectly impacted 16.5 million Texans through conservation assistance, saved 4,444 structures and more than \$569 million in property value during Texas wildfires, and treated 11,577 acres to reduce hazardous fire fuels, just to name a few.

Internally, we initiated and completed a modification to our Agency's organizational structure to become operationally and administratively more effective while improving the safety and well-being of our personnel. These modifications provided more leadership opportunities for emerging leaders and helped us to be more all-encompassing in our decision-making.

Changes at the field level are intended to enhance Agency operations and operational relationships. We have hired more structural firefighters and augmented our Emergency Operations Center with our Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid and Texas Commission on Fire Protection partners.

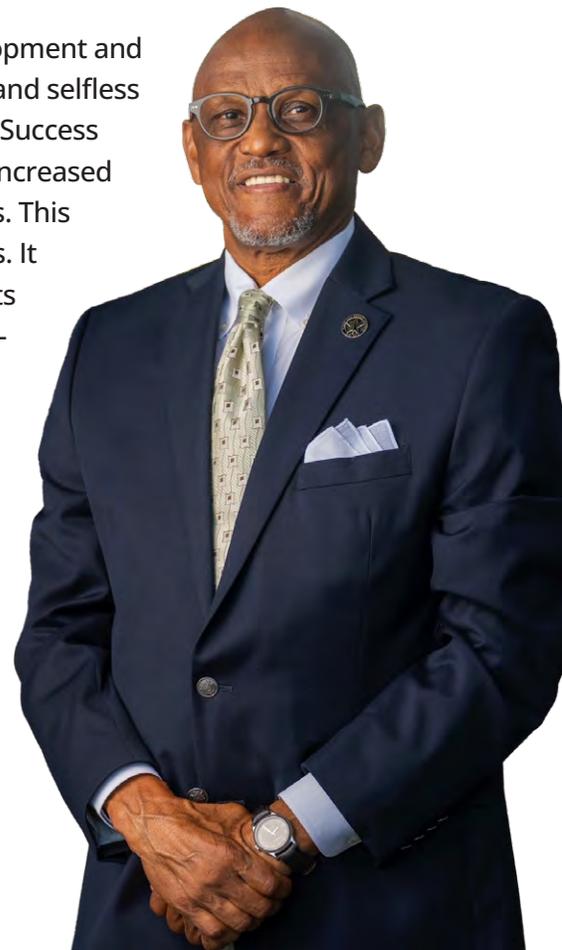
The success of our Agency rests on the passion for natural resource development and protection shown by our more than 500 personnel. Their professionalism and selfless service persevered throughout the year and when Texans needed it most. Success would also not have been possible without state legislation that provided increased funding to help extend our statewide impact and accomplish internal goals. This additional funding helped provide \$14 million in grants to fire departments. It also allowed us to enhance our personnel recruitment and retention efforts by adding essential positions, implementing pay increases and more merit-based payment opportunities - resulting in a reduction of our turnover rate from 13.8% to 9.6%.

As we move forward, we remain focused on continuous improvement and I am confident that we will forge ahead with strong momentum from the experiences we have taken to heart, enhancements we have made and our passion to care for the lands and people of Texas.

Forward Together...al



Al Davis, DIRECTOR
TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE



CONSERVE. PROTECT. LEAD.

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE provides technical assistance and leadership to influence land stewardship practices and guide growth and enhancement of the state's natural resources so that Texas lands continue to meet the needs of the present without compromising the future. We are the premier source for relevant, timely information and assistance, delivering these in such a way that the health, resilience and productivity of Texas landscapes maintain an upward trajectory.

Texas is a great place to live, as evidenced by the nearly half a million people who move here every year. It can also be a tough place to live – particularly for trees and associated vegetation – with temperature extremes in every season, frequent storms, and high wildfire potential. The last several years have been particularly hard on the state's trees and forests, from unprecedented heat waves and ice storms to the largest wildfire in recorded history. Between rapid urbanization and climatic influences, without intervention these vulnerable landscapes could be lost.

In 2024, Texas A&M Forest Service grew and distributed over 67,000 trees for restoration and enhancement efforts across the state, including the Green Futures program which matches corporate sustainability goals investments with high-need areas to plant trees. Additionally, the agency was fortunate in 2024

to receive federal funding to augment existing and establish new direct financial assistance programs to landowners, municipalities and other land steward stakeholder groups.

These financial opportunities will help support agency goals to assess and advance the resiliency and sustainability of Texas lands, especially those that have been impacted by wildfire and other disasters, to integrate trees, forests and woodlands into all scales of planning, and to identify economic opportunities and improve product markets.

Focus areas for 2025 are post-fire and post-storm assessment and recovery, from market evaluation to land restoration; promoting the role of trees and solutions to issues that affect Texans' quality of life; and supporting workforce development in forestry, arboriculture, range management and fire ecology sectors.



ABOVE: Forest resources personnel work to replant ponderosa pine seedlings in the Davis Mountains Preserve as part of the agency's "Operation Ponderosa" joint project with The Nature Conservancy which aims to reforest the lost ponderosas in the Davis Mountains region. 23 July 2024



INTRODUCTION BY

Gretchen Riley

FORESTRY AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
DIVISION DIRECTOR
TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE



TEXAS A&M
FOREST SERVICE

CONSERVATION

BY THE NUMBERS, FY2024

Assisted in
the planting of

57,863

TREES

across Texas

Produced enough
seeds to plant

245.8 M

SEEDLINGS

in the coming years

For Texas Arbor Day
and community events,

9,992

SEEDLINGS

were distributed

531

STEWARDSHIP PLANS

written, covering

75,230

ACRES

1,336

PLOTS MEASURED

by FIA, representing over

8 M

ACRES

278

COMMUNITIES

assisted, covering over

16.5 M

RESIDENTS*

**includes people
indirectly assisted*

9,912

PEOPLE ENGAGED

through educational
programs and
workshops

129,678

LANDOWNERS

assisted with oak wilt,
tree consultations and
forest stewardship

162

COMMUNITIES

actively managing their forest

*through professional forestry
staff or community forest
management plans*

2,597

ACRES TREATED

by TEXAS A&M FOREST
SERVICE on State Lands

CONSERVE.

Impact of the Forest Sector, Landowner Assistance

Since 1915, TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE has worked with public and private landowners to steward and sustain the state's forest resources. One of the primary reasons the agency was established was to restore the vast area of cutover forests that was so common during that time. This started the recognition of the importance of forests to the economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of the state.

Forest Sector

Today, Texas forests and woodlands span almost 60 million acres, making it *the second most forested state in the country*. Approximately 12 million acres, concentrated in the eastern portion of the state, are suitable for the production of commercial forest products.

These resources are an economic engine, contributing to the Texas economy while supporting rural communities across the state.

An analysis conducted by Texas A&M Forest Service last year indicated the total economic contribution of the Texas forest sector was \$54.2 billion while supporting more than 187,500 jobs. The forest-based industry was one of the top 10 manufacturing sectors in the state, and timber ranked ninth among Texas' agricultural commodities. This value doesn't even include the numerous environmental and social benefits provided by these landscapes.

Each year, Texas A&M Forest Service personnel collect information on forest conditions across the state, measuring permanently established plots to determine composition, growth, quality and mortality of forests, as well as land use changes and wildfire potential.

"We're constantly monitoring what's happening in the forest," Aaron Stottlemeyer, Forest Analytics Department Head said. "That's how we know how much timber is growing versus how much is harvested."

This information is crucial in assessing the health and sustainability of Texas forest resources, as well as supporting economic development, forest conservation and wildfire risk preparedness. Data collected by the agency shows the growth of commercial timber in the state is outpacing the amount that is being removed. These forest inventory reports also show that *enough wood grows in East Texas to fill a logging truck every 19 seconds*.

"Texas is well positioned from a resource availability standpoint," said Stottlemeyer. "There are clearly opportunities for additional forest-based manufacturing capacity, and we regularly respond to inquiries regarding timber supply."



LEFT: The E.O. Siecke State Forest in Jasper County is home to more than 1,700 acres of several pine tree varieties and fire lookout towers that were used in the 1900s.



Landowner Assistance

More than 90% of the state's commercial timberlands are privately owned. Family forest owners make up the largest segment of this total, accounting for almost 6 million acres, and are a primary audience for the agency. Providing education and technical assistance to this group has been foundational for the agency since the beginning.

Agency personnel work with these families and individuals to develop and implement plans that will help them achieve a wide range of objectives they have for their property.

“Landowners are very interested in how to manage their forests properly. We put them on the path to improve the health, productivity, and sustainability of their lands,” said Stottlemeyer.

Forestry in Texas is in a circular economy. Trees are planted, sustainably managed for a wide variety of benefits, harvested and processed into products, all with very little waste, and then new trees are planted to restart the cycle. Texas A&M Forest Service plays a prominent role in ensuring the continuation of this cycle.

ABOVE: Cut timber is being stacked by a harvest crew.

BELOW: A stack of timber waits to be hauled by a logger to a mill where it will be transformed into a wood product like paper, wood chips, lumber and more.



CONSERVE.

Celebrations Commence State Forest Centennial Year

Since 1925, Texas A&M Forest Service has owned and managed five state forests and arboretums throughout East Texas, and it is hosting celebrations to recognize a century of sustainable forestry.

The State Forest Centennial season began with an event at the W.G. Jones State Forest in Conroe October 19, 2024. Additional events will be held at the I.D. Fairchild State Forest April 26, 2025, and E.O. Siecke State Forest in fall 2025.

“Our first celebration brought in over 850 visitors,” said Jake Donellan, Texas A&M Forest Service Field Operations Division Director. “The Jones is the most visited state forest, located in the backyards and neighborhoods of many in Conroe, and it is one of the largest managed urban forests in the nation. It is imperative that we begin our State Forest Centennial Season there.”

At 1,700 acres, the Jones State Forest offers metro Houston convenient access to nature and forestry education. The Jones is also home to several clusters of red-cockaded woodpeckers, a federally listed species, that nest and roost over 30 feet high in the forest’s canopy in mature, live pine trees.

The Fairchild State Forest event in April 2025 will feature a tour for landowners, focusing on emerging and sustainable silviculture practices.

The Fairchild State Forest was formerly owned by the State Prison System and was home to the Mewshaw Mill, the only state-operated sawmill. The sawmill was staffed by convict labor and produced 35,000 board feet of lumber daily.

Now, the Fairchild State Forest exemplifies sustainable forestry and is also home to red-cockaded woodpecker families. The Fairchild also hosts numerous forestry education opportunities for students, forestry

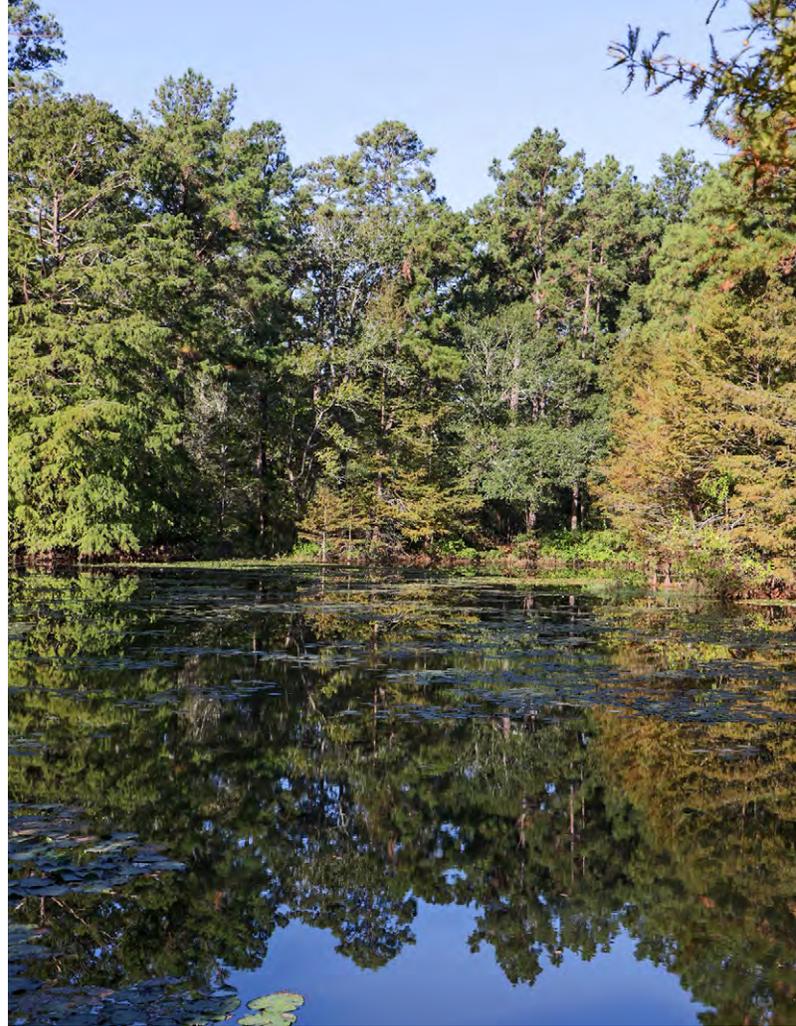


ABOVE: Texas State Forests' Centennial Celebration postcard. Each of the five state forests are featured within the letters of "TEXAS" and a nod to Texas Parks & Wildlife Department's Mission Tejas State Park, formerly a state forest under Texas A&M Forest Service, in the background.

professionals and landowners in addition to hosting an annual youth deer hunt in cooperation with Texas Parks & Wildlife Department.

The final celebration event will occur in fall 2025 at the Siecke State Forest, the first state forest acquired by Texas A&M Forest Service in 1924. This forest in Newton County received its name in 1951 in recognition of the contributions to the advancement of sustainable forestry in Texas by the second director and state forester, Eric O. Siecke.

Under Siecke's leadership, the forest was home to the first fire lookout tower in Texas, constructed in 1926. Several notable programs were established here, including the first pine seedling nursery in the state and a Civilian Conservation Corps Camp. Today, Siecke State Forest hosts an annual youth deer hunt and numerous 4-H and adult forestry education short courses.



“Siecke, both the man and the state forest that bears his name, has etched out an impactful legacy for silvicultural practices and the forest industry in East Texas that still stands today,” said Donellan. “Through innovative forest management and dedicated education outreach, forest industry leaders adopted many practices which were tested and demonstrated on the forest and have had immense positive impacts on the industry, including the rise of the largest yellow pine newsprint mill in the South that opened in Lufkin in 1939.”

The State Forest Centennial Celebration events also highlight collaborations between state agencies and natural resource organizations that have led to advancements in forestry and wildlife protection. Just like privately owned forests, portions of the state forests are periodically harvested and sold, and new trees are replanted. Revenues generated from these timber sales are normally reinvested back into the forest.

Texas State Forests provide immense value to the state as they each contain unique native ecosystems, provide real and intrinsic value to the surrounding local communities, and help sustain economic growth for family-owned forest landowners and the forest industry as a direct result of the management and efforts of Texas A&M Forest Service. They are an experimental ground and demonstration area for sustainable silvicultural practices like prescribed fire, forest thinning and seed propagation. State forests are also an outdoor classroom, attracting thousands of students, nature enthusiasts and horseback riders of all ages.

TOP LEFT: Parker Jones, Texas A&M Forest Service Radio Communications Specialist, shows visitors equipment that is used on wildfire response operations.

BOTTOM LEFT: Julia Schmidt, Texas A&M Forest Service Water Resources Forester, demonstrates the biology of a sustainable forest ecosystem.

TOP RIGHT: The Jones State Forest has several ponds that are home to many wildlife species.

CONSERVE. PROTECT. LEAD.

As the lead agency for wildfire response in Texas, TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE plays a vital role in safeguarding citizens, property and natural resources from the destructive impacts of wildfires. With strategically placed personnel and equipment, the agency ensures a swift and coordinated response, whether in rural or urban areas. Our commitment to wildfire suppression helps protect lives and communities statewide.

In addition to wildfire response, Texas A&M Forest Service is a key player in the broader state emergency network, trained to assist in a range of disasters, from winter weather to flooding and tornadoes. The agency's dedication to protecting people and natural resources remains steadfast, whether responding to wildfires or other crises.

Central to the agency's efforts is the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan, which reduces wildfire frequency and severity through a comprehensive approach. This plan not only focuses on suppression but also on proactive measures that equip communities with tools to prepare for wildfires. The plan emphasizes collaboration and strategic partnerships, ensuring lives and property are protected. A critical component of this strategy is the collaboration with Texas' 1,841 local fire departments, which are the

first line of defense against wildfires. We support these departments with training, funding and resources to enhance their ability to manage wildfires effectively.

Protecting communities from the devastating impacts of wildfires can only be achieved through close collaboration with local, state and federal partners. By refining our capacity-building programs, improving response standards and utilizing scientific mitigation strategies, we ensure that our state is better prepared for the challenges of wildfire management. The collective effort of all partners—local fire departments, state agencies and federal entities—forms the foundation of our success. Together, we can ensure the safety and resilience of Texas, protecting both the people and landscapes we serve for generations to come.



LEFT: A Texas A&M Forest Service bulldozer creates a fire break as a chinook helicopter flies over farmland carrying water to the Smokehouse Creek Fire as high winds caused a flare up to reignite the record breaking fire. 2 May 2024

ABOVE: A Texas A&M Forest Service strike team works a prescribed burn at Camp Bowie. 20 Feb 2024



INTRODUCTION BY

Jacob Donnellan

FIELD OPERATIONS
DIVISION DIRECTOR
TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE



TEXAS A&M
FOREST SERVICE

PROTECTION

BY THE NUMBERS, FY2024

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE
and local fire departments
responded to

5,187
WILDFIRES



1,300,579
ACRES BURNED

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE
utilized

518

AGENCY
PERSONNEL

57

ALL-HAZARD
IMTs

12

ENGINES

66

DOZERS

8

MOTOR
GRADERS

With additional support
from

42 OTHER
STATES

consisting of

1,479

FIREFIGHTERS

108

ENGINES

18

DOZERS

Agency wildfire suppression
efforts **SAVED**

4,444

STRUCTURES

\$569.2 M

in PROPERTY VALUES

127 AIRCRAFT utilized
by the agency for
aerial wildfire suppression

55

AIRTANKERS

46

FIXED
WINGS

26

HELICOPTERS

Which made **4,125** DROPS
consisting of

3,716,650

GALLONS of water
with fire retardant

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE
Law Enforcement cases

68

FIRE

INVESTIGATIONS

1

ARSON
INDICTMENT

(Brewster County)

38

TIMBER
THEFT

\$52k

RECOVERED
to Texas Landowners

Personnel response to
All-Hazard Incidents

16

WINTER
WEATHER

7 Jan. & 9 Feb.

114

SEVERE
WEATHER

26 April

106

TROPICAL
WEATHER

17 June & 6 July

Out-of-state Response by
TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE

12

ENGINES

7

DOZERS

to

18

STATES

Emergency Response
Training provided

284

COURSES

4,415

STUDENTS

74,522

CONTACT HOURS

PROTECT.

Panhandle Wildfires

The 2024 Texas panhandle wildfires were devastating. Beginning Feb. 26, seven wildfires burned 1,238,668 acres, with the Smokehouse Creek Fire becoming the largest wildfire in Texas state history. Alone, it burned over 1 million acres of land between the Texas panhandle and Oklahoma, making it one of the largest wildfires in United States history.

Two people lost their lives, thousands of livestock were lost and there was significant damage to homes, ranches and infrastructure. Equal to the devastation was the magnitude of the wildfire response. Forty-four local panhandle fire departments responded, alongside 807 firefighters and response personnel under Texas A&M Forest Service jurisdiction.

The causes of the wildfires and contributing factors include high winds, dry conditions and grassland ecosystems that supported the rapid spread of the fires. Because of the wildfires, concerns have been raised regarding aging power infrastructure, the regulation of private oil field power lines, the role of private landowners in response efforts and the state's capability to respond to wildfires of this scale.

In April, the Texas House of Representatives Panhandle Wildfire Investigative Committee was commissioned to explore ways to prevent future wildfires and to improve wildfire disaster preparedness, response and mitigation.

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE has since taken steps to address key concerns and improve response efforts.



LEFT: Jason Calvet, Texas A&M Forest Service Regional Coordinator, reviews wildfire response operations during the Smokehouse Creek Fire. 1 Mar 2024

Cooperation

Our field personnel involved in the panhandle wildfire response participated in an After-Action Review (AAR) facilitated by Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service in June 2024. This review provided an opportunity for personnel from multiple agencies to reflect on the response, identify successes and highlight areas for improvement for future large-scale incidents in the region.

Agency leadership regularly meets with landowners and stakeholders to strengthen relationships and discuss concerns, as well as strategies for collaboration moving forward.

We are working to enhance coordination with the Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS) by hiring TIFMAS Coordinators. These coordinators will act as liaisons with local jurisdictions and facilitate additional training opportunities.

In partnership with the Texas & Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association Special Rangers, we are establishing improvements to communication and information sharing with landowners during large and complex wildfire incidents.

In February 2025, our Predictive Services Department and the Oklahoma Forestry Services, presented the 2025 winter/spring season outlook at the annual National Weather Service Partners Meeting in Borger, Texas. The event was attended by 115 officials from county and local governments, fire departments, federal agencies and neighboring states.

RIGHT: Fire retardant and water were routinely dropped from aircraft to suppress the growing wildfires in the Panhandle. 2 Mar 2024

Operations

Our aviation program managers and private pilots in the panhandle have spearheaded the formation of a cooperative group among helicopter operators on private ranchlands, focused on protecting property in the region.

We are reducing the reliance on bulldozers for wildfire suppression in regions where local topography, fuel types and landowner preferences suggest alternative approaches. To this end, three motor graders were purchased to improve response capabilities in the panhandle.

Predictive Services

The agency's Predictive Services Department continues to work closely with the National Weather Service (NWS) to enhance fire weather warnings and align them more closely with actual fire conditions.

We met in Oklahoma with NWS and electric utility providers to explore partnership opportunities aimed at reducing wildfire risk and improving public safety by analyzing the weather patterns leading to Southern Plains Wildfire Outbreak conditions and addressing wildfire ignitions caused by powerlines.

Wildfire Mitigation and Preparedness

We are partnering with community leaders in the panhandle to strengthen wildfire mitigation efforts, with a focus on community protection. Strategy meetings with county judges have led to planning defensible space workshops, fuel mitigation projects and community engagement initiatives. We will also offer Structure Ignition Zone train-the-trainer courses for volunteer firefighters and agency staff. These courses will focus on understanding structure ignition zones and developing effective risk assessments to communicate recommendations to residents.

In collaboration with Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service, a bulletin titled Wildfire: Prepare Your Ranch was released in January 2025. This document provides landowners and ranchers with valuable tools and resources for wildfire mitigation.



Information

Our Law Enforcement Department has implemented new procedures for sharing investigations related to oil and gas infrastructure and powerlines with the Railroad Commission of Texas and the Public Utility Commission of Texas. These workflows will streamline information sharing and enhance coordination during wildfire events.

On Feb. 26-27, 2024, thousands of people across the panhandle received wireless emergency alerts warning of an eminent, dangerous wildfire on the landscape with the potential to expand. These notifications utilized a first-of-its-kind process, benefiting from major advancements in fire and weather prediction technology and a foundation in strong inter-agency relationships. The announcements are among the first multi-notification processes used for a large-scale wildfire in Texas. We are exploring this new warning process to provide timelier notification of wildfires, more accurate fire behavior imaging and a safer environment for community members and first responders.

To address the need for a database of local equipment available to respond to wildfires, we are updating FireConnect, our incident reporting system for fire departments across the state, to make the itemized equipment in the system visible to all fire departments.

Building Capacity

We are exploring opportunities to expand the State Surplus Property Program and have met with the Texas Facilities Commission to discuss potential partnerships and opportunities.

The panhandle fires happened under devastatingly conducive weather and fuel conditions. We wish this was a one-time occurrence, but wildfires will happen again. Texas A&M Forest Service is working to enhance its preparedness for future large-scale wildfire events.

PROTECT.

Law Enforcement Officers Protect Texans from Timber Theft and Investigate Wildfires

For 110 years TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE has worked to conserve and protect the natural resources of Texas, and for nearly as long, agency law enforcement officers have played a significant role in upholding those values.

The Texas A&M Forest Service Law Enforcement department is comprised of 10 investigators and up to 15 officers led by Chief Law Enforcement Officer Connor Murnane. Investigators and officers are located throughout the state and investigate timber theft and wildfires.

The department was created in the 1920s to investigate wildfires and grew to include timber theft investigations and public education in 1977.

patterns on tree bark and ash color are all indicators of a fire's origin. Based on the totality of the circumstances and evidence, investigators will conduct a criminal investigation into the cause of the fire and any potential arson suspects.

“It is always important to attempt to determine the cause of any fire,” said Murnane. “We are able to internally share wildfire data to be used for future targeted mitigation and prevention communications to the public.”

Wildfire Investigation

Similar to the agency's wildfire response process, Law Enforcement investigates wildfires in a tiered approach. Following a wildfire, local law enforcement and investigators initiate investigations but will often request Texas A&M Forest Service Law Enforcement officers to assist.

In 2024, the department investigated 151 wildfires, including the Smokehouse Creek Fire—the largest wildfire in Texas history. The department also assisted the Brewster County Sheriff's Office with an arson investigation that led to the grand jury indictment of a suspected serial arsonist in 2024.

During the cause and origin investigation of a wildfire, investigators examine contributing factors such as weather conditions, vegetative fuel consumption, as well as macro and micro burn pattern indicators. Grass stems, scorching



ABOVE: Texas A&M Forest Service Law Enforcement Investigator, Dennis Cochran, collects evidence during an arson investigation.

Timber Theft

The Law Enforcement department also protects the integrity of the timber sale process.

Unlike many misconceptions, *timber theft and fraud often occur face-to-face in broad daylight.*

“Skimming is a common method in timber sales where a harvester only informs the landowner of a percentage of the hauled timber and profits off of undeclared loads,” said Murnane. “Diversion is another method where loads are hauled to a different mill than what was agreed upon.”

When selling timber, landowners should visit their property frequently, check references of the buyer, get bids for each product class and mark all property lines prior to beginning any harvest. The use of a consultant forester ensures timber is sold for a fair price and harvesters are held to the terms of the contract.

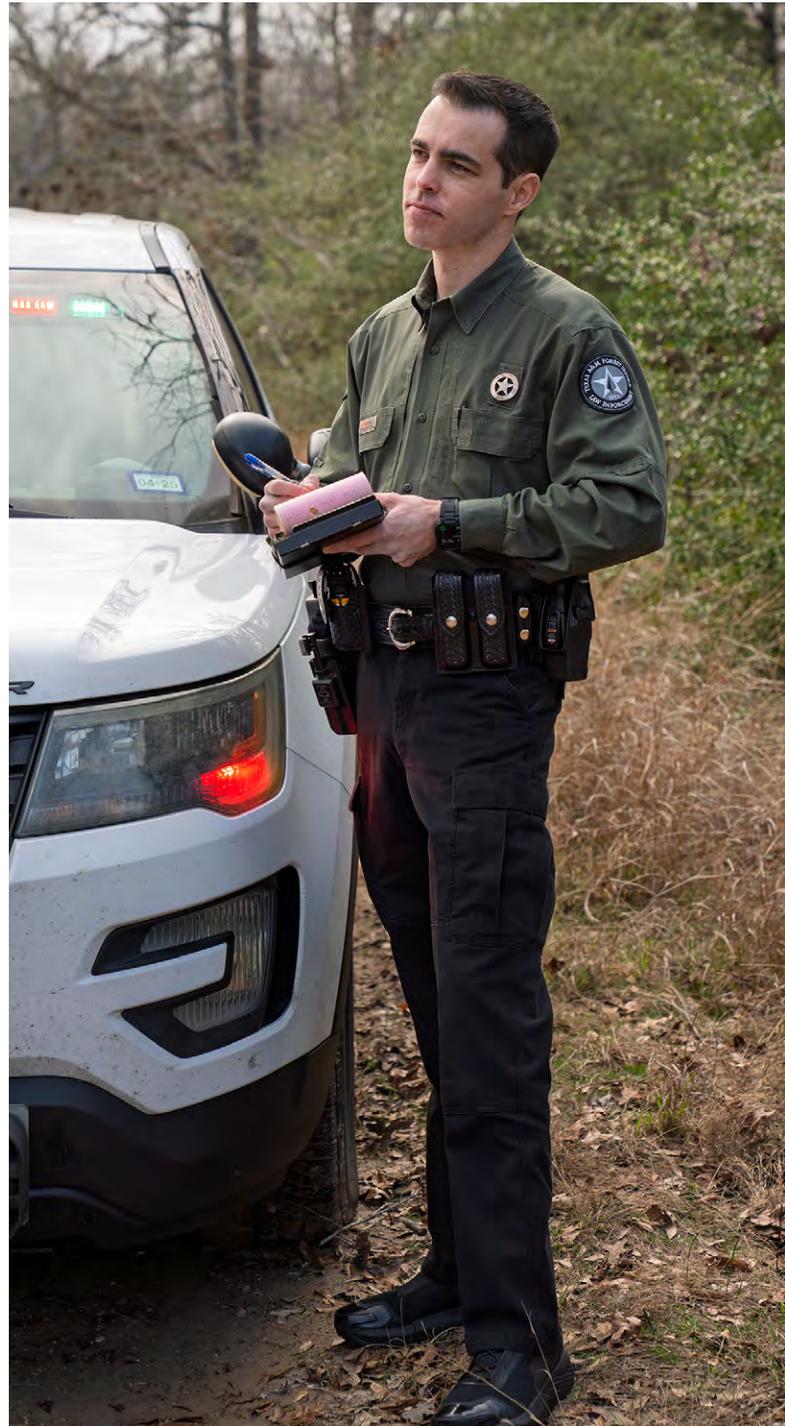
Often, landowners are unaware of the crime until after it takes place. When this occurs, landowners may report the event to Law Enforcement officers to initiate an investigation.

During timber theft investigations, investigators search through large volumes of scale tickets, loader sheets and financial statements that are generated during a timber harvest. To determine any criminal intent or neglect, investigators must know where the wood was harvested, where it was delivered and who did and did not get paid their fair share.

As a result of the 71 timber theft investigations conducted by the department in 2024, approximately \$53,000 has been recovered to landowners through a rectification agreement between the buyer and landowner.

In the event of legal action, Texas A&M Forest Service investigators testify in court and present the findings of their investigation to the local district attorney for criminal prosecution.

“In a day and age where people are too often deferred to generic online resources, we are here to provide face-to-face interaction with landowners and boots-on-the-ground expertise for investigations that lead to criminal prosecution and restitution,” said Murnane.



ABOVE: Texas A&M Forest Service Chief Law Enforcement Officer Connor Murnane, leads a timber theft investigation that was called in through the Timber Theft Hotline.

If you believe timber theft may have occurred on your property, you can file a report through the **TIMBER THEFT HOTLINE** at **1-800-364-3470**.

CONSERVE. PROTECT. LEAD.

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability and health of Texas' trees, forests and related natural resources. With a commitment to fostering long-term ecological balance, the agency provides statewide leadership and technical assistance to protect and enhance the state's diverse ecosystems. The agency leads forest stewardship efforts through landowner workshops, one-on-one landowner consultation, forest health research and post-wildfire tree recovery. These efforts help ensure the safety and resilience of communities across the state.

A cornerstone of the agency's mission is the promotion of leadership development within the wildland fire service and natural resource management sectors. This focus ensures Texas is equipped with skilled professionals who can address the state's evolving challenges. By offering training, resources and technical assistance, the agency helps build a workforce capable of confronting complex issues like wildfire management and land restoration.

As the lead agency for wildfire response, Texas A&M Forest Service works proactively with local communities to foster education, build capacity and ensure wildfire preparedness. The agency equips homeowners, businesses, and local governments with the knowledge and tools needed to mitigate wildfire risks, reducing the potential loss of property and life.

Moving forward, the agency aims to define clearer expectations for wildfire response, including standards for response times, dispatch protocols, and interoperable communications. By tracking key datasets and integrating scientific strategies into fire mitigation, the agency aims to improve its understanding of the highest-risk communities and strengthen response efforts, ultimately enhancing the safety of Texans.



UPPER LEFT: Texas A&M Forest Service Forester, Jason Ellis, and Stephen F. Austin State University forestry students discuss the effects of prescribed burns (performed earlier in the year in that location) on a shortleaf pine stand at I.D. Fairchild State Forest. 14 Jul 2024.

LOWER LEFT: Fire Coordinator Matt Burnett presents Waskom Volunteer Fire Department with grant funding for a large brush truck. 4 May 2024.

INTRODUCTION BY

Jared Karns

FIRE & EMERGENCY
RESPONSE DIVISION
DIRECTOR

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE





BY THE NUMBERS, FY2024

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE AWARDED

\$50.9M+

to fire departments and
volunteer fire departments
(capacity building)

\$15.2M+

for community forestry grants,
community planting projects,
community resilience and
tree canopy enhancements

\$402.2K+

for protecting communities
and supporting fire-resilient
landscapes
(Rx burns / mechanical fuel treatments)

\$434.0K+

for native forest restoration
and sustainable forestry

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

785

PIECES OF EQUIPMENT
given to fire departments and
volunteer fire departments

11,578

ACRES TREATED
for fuel reduction
(pass through grants only)

Sustainable Forestry
Treatments

6,780 AC TREATED

10,066 FT TRENCHED

for Oak Wilt Containment

NUMBER OF TEXAS COMMUNITIES

Tree City USA certified
by Arbor Day Foundation

97

Designated as
Firewise USA® Sites

105

With a Community
Wildfire Protection Plan

88

73,007

HOURS TRAINING

provided to professionals on
forestry and arboriculture-
related concepts

14.2M

CITIZENS REACHED

through social media outreach

LEAD.

Community Forestry Grants

In spring 2024, TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE awarded 21 Texas cities, nonprofit organizations and schools with funding through the Community Forestry Grants Program, totaling \$15.3 million.

Community Forestry grants fund recipients' strategic initiatives such as tree planting and maintenance, community forestry management and forest access and education. These initiatives are part of larger, unique community forestry solutions that align with and improve public planning at all levels.

Grant categories through this program include Community Resiliency, Geospatial Analysis, Human Health Accessibility and Improvement, Municipal Forester, Schoolyard Forest, Tree City USA and Tree Planting — all of which offer funding to address specific community needs.

"This was the most impactful year for our Community Forestry Grants program," said Mac Martin, Texas A&M Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program Leader. "More importantly, the organizations that received these grants—at a higher rate than ever before—now have the resources to implement urban and community forestry programs that will benefit current and future generations."

The Community Forestry Grants program was established in 2022 and awarded its first recipients in 2023. The goal of this program is to build healthier and more resilient, livable communities across Texas through sound urban and community forestry practices. By strengthening urban and community forests, the economic, environmental, physical and mental well-being of all Texans can improve.

The strategy of these grants is to spearhead local programs across the state in addressing nature-based solutions to issues facing communities today like urban heat islands.

"Nearly every Texan faces impacts from extreme heat, whether it's safety of outdoor workers or rising energy costs from needing to run air conditioning more often," said Martin. "Heat islands are areas within communities that experience higher temperatures than surrounding regions, typically found in more developed areas with an abundance of surfaces that absorb and retain heat. As Texas' population grows and communities expand, it's crucial that we develop sustainably to protect the health and safety of our residents."

Through strategic tree planting, communities can help mitigate the effects of heat islands and improve mental and physical health access for community members. Access to treed green spaces and forests has been proven to reduce temperatures by up to 20° F, protect against harmful UV rays, improve air quality and lower blood pressure and heart rate.

The Schoolyard Forest grants will increase access and exposure on 37 elementary and middle school campuses by increasing campuses' canopy coverage up to 30%, developing natural play areas and introducing forest and science-based curricula for students to learn about nature.

"These schoolyard forest grants are going to create safer outdoor recreation opportunities for students, lending to better physical health," Martin said. "But there is also extensive, peer-reviewed, research showing that access to treed natural areas improves students' focus, mood regulation and even performance in the classroom. Through these grants, we aim to create an environment that develops happier, healthier children while providing them with a real-world understanding of the many benefits forests offer."

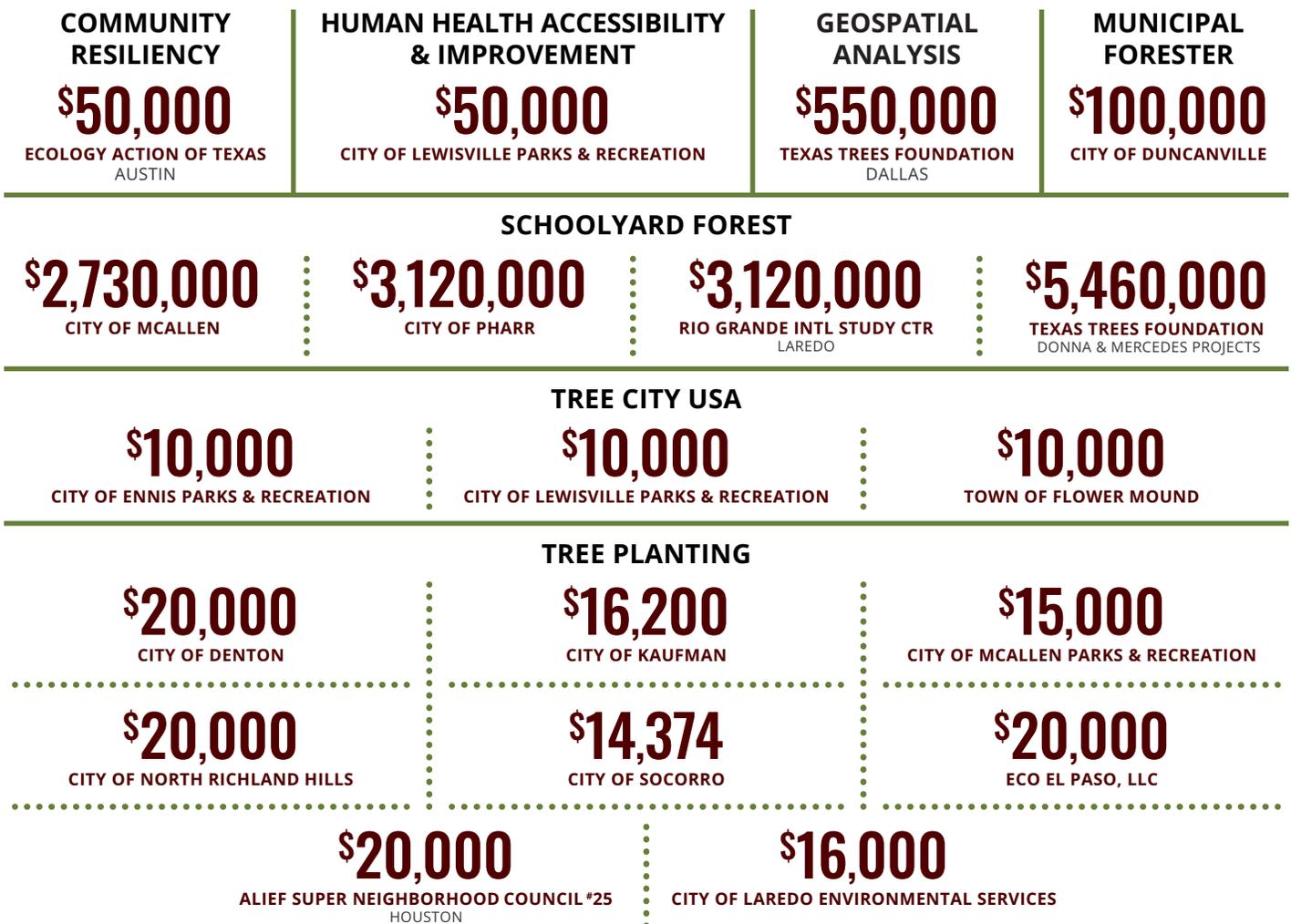


LEFT: Urban & Community Forester Kate Farris and Urban & Community Forestry Program Leader Mac Martin demonstrate planting procedures to volunteers before a community tree planting in College Station. 22 Feb 2024

RIGHT: Alief Super Neighborhood Council #25 (Houston) volunteers help combat the effects of urban heat islands with a tree planting coordinated through Texas A&M Forest Service Green Futures Program. 22 Jan 2024

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE **COMMUNITY FORESTRY**

FY2024 GRANT BREAKDOWN



LEAD.

Bolstering Statewide Firefighting Capacity and Preparedness

With a tiered firefighting approach, local fire departments and volunteer fire departments are the front line of defense against wildfires in Texas. To bolster these cooperators, TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE provides grants, training and equipment through various departments and programs.

To directly assist Texas fire departments and manage fire department grant programs, the agency established the Capacity Building Department which has awarded over \$650 million worth of assistance through grants and equipment since its inception in 2001.

“Texas’ local fire departments are the first to respond to wildfires and diverse emergencies and natural disasters,” said Jason Keiningham, Texas A&M Forest Service Capacity Building Department Head. “Providing them with the funding, training and equipment they need is essential to ensuring they can respond safely and effectively. Texas has the most aggressive suite of programs in the country aimed at building fire service capacity and providing assistance and working alongside our partners in the shared mission to protect life and property.”

In fiscal year 2024, the Texas A&M Forest Service Capacity Building Department awarded over \$39 million in grants and equipment to Texas fire departments through the Rural VFD Assistance Program, Department of Defense Firefighter Property Program, Helping Hands Program, Rural VFD Insurance Program and Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System (TIFMAS) Grants Program.

The agency is in the process of integrating these assistance programs into FireConnect, an online portal that provides a comprehensive directory of Texas fire departments for the public and all Texas fire service agencies. This portal also allows departments to submit incident reports to increase statewide situational awareness and track wildfire suppression costs. Texas A&M Forest Service also takes on the role of ensuring that local, state and federal fire department partners are trained on fighting wildfires through nationally accredited single-course delivery, multi-course events and the Texas Interagency Wildfire and

Incident Management Academies. As the official signatory of the National Wildfire Coordinating Group (NWCG) for the state of Texas and holding accreditation by the NWCG, TIFMAS, Texas State Fire Marshal’s Association and Texas Commission on Fire Protection, the agency has trained over 100,000 firefighters in wildfire fighting through various programs.

“Our responsibility is to ensure that individuals receive qualifications that reflect their knowledge and expertise,” said Jonathan Motsinger, Texas A&M Forest Service Professional Development Department Head. “It is our goal to support and empower local fire departments across Texas by providing the skills, knowledge and tools needed to fight wildfires through hands-on training, educational resources and collaborative efforts.”

One of the largest reaching annual training programs led by the agency is the Texas Interagency Wildfire Incident Management Academies, created in 1998. These academies provide wide-ranging courses from foundational wildland firefighter training to specialized courses for high-level, supervisory roles. The academies are offered in May (Lufkin) and October (Bastrop) annually, and they



ABOVE: 8-Line Interagency Training Group Photo, 2024

foster diverse learning environment that promotes professional development across all levels of emergency response.

Beyond the annual training academies, fire departments also participate in prescribed fires led by certified Texas

A&M Forest Service prescribed burners at state forests. Collaborating with local fire departments for prescribed fires allows firefighters training and preparation for when they may be called to respond to wildfires.

“As the Texas population continues to grow, it is our priority to enhance our working relationships with and assistance to fire departments statewide,” said Motsinger. “This responsibility is large, but we will continue to equip our cooperators with the best technology, equipment and training available.”

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE **CAPACITY BUILDING**

FY2024 GRANT/ASSISTANCE BREAKDOWN

<p>RVFDAP, HB 2604 (Rural VFD Assistance Program)</p> <p>67 TRUCKS 233 EQUIPMENT 2,121 TUITION</p> <hr/> <p>VOLUNTEER FIRE ASSISTANCE</p> <p>\$20,390,289</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>	<p>FEDERAL EXCESS PERSONAL PROPERTY PROGRAM (FEPP)</p> <p>199 COMMUNITIES 283 ASSETS</p> <p>\$11,671,693</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>	<p>RURAL VFD INSURANCE PROGRAM, HB 3667</p> <p>13,998 FIREFIGHTERS 642 DEPARTMENTS</p> <p>\$2,458,559</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>
<p>STATE OF DISASTER <i>151 Emergency Grants</i></p> <p>\$1,642,495</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p> <hr/> <p>CATASTROPHIC LOSS <i>27 Emergency Grants</i></p> <p>\$380,782</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>	<p>DOD FIREFIGHTER PROPERTY PROGRAM (FFP)</p> <p>71 ASSISTS 71 ITEMS</p> <p>\$9,109,858</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>	<p>TIFMAS GRANTS PROGRAM (Texas Intrastate Fire Mutual Aid System)</p> <p>658 TRAINEES 4 FIRE APPARATUS 277 TUITION</p> <p>\$2,480,440</p> <p>TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>
<p>OVERALL RVFDAP ASSISTANCE VALUE</p> <p>\$22,875,333</p>	<p>HELPING HANDS PROGRAM, HB 680</p> <p>158 DEPARTMENTS \$2,321,520 TOTAL ASSISTANCE VALUE</p>	<p>VFD MOTOR VEHICLE SELF INSURANCE PROGRAM, SB 1232 (Risk Pool)</p> <p>139 VFDs 637 VEHICLES</p>

TEXAS A&M
FOREST SERVICE **GRANTS**

BREAKDOWN, FY2024

TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE provides grants to communities, nonprofit organizations, fire departments, cooperators and more throughout the state to ensure the sustainability and security of all Texans. These grants are respectively funded by state and federal allocations and are offered through passthrough and reimbursement-style programs.

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

\$434,027

COMMUNITY FORESTRY

\$15,331,574

FUELS REDUCTION

\$402,202

HELPING HANDS

\$2,321,520

TEXAS FIRE MUTUAL AID SYSTEM

\$2,480,440

**FEDERAL EXCESS
PERSONAL PROPERTY**

\$248,381

DoD FIREFIGHTER PROPERTY

\$9,109,858

RURAL VFD ASSISTANCE

\$22,875,330

RURAL VFD INSURANCE

\$2,458,559

**FY2024
TOTAL \$55,413,511**



LEFT: Zachary Ovelgonne, District Forester, plants trees during a community planting in Norris Frank Park in Lufkin. 9 Nov 2024



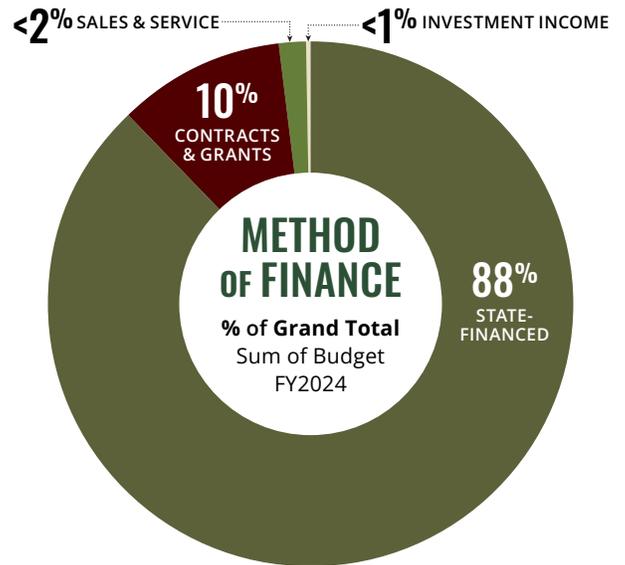
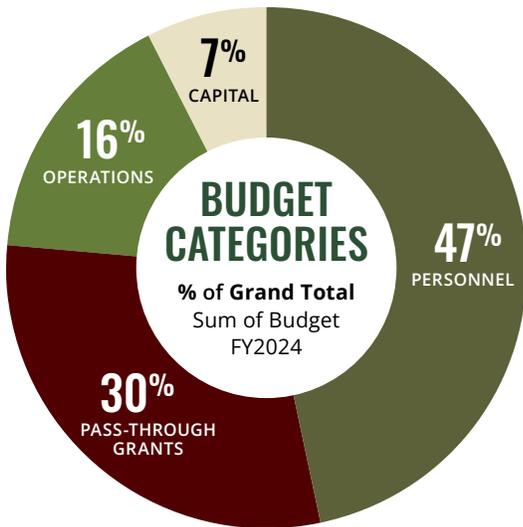
RIGHT: Andrew McGuire, Resource Specialist, inspects a fire truck acquired by Lazbuddie Volunteer Fire Department using funds awarded through the Rural Volunteer Fire Department Assistance Program. 10 July 2024



EXPENDITURES

BUDGETED EXPENSE CATEGORIES, FY2024

	SUM OF BUDGET	PERSONNEL	PASS-THROUGH GRANTS	OPERATIONS	CAPITAL	GRAND TOTAL
METHOD OF FINANCE	STATE-FINANCED	\$41,857,243	\$27,159,494	\$11,453,604	\$7,398,788	\$87,868,129
	CONTRACTS & GRANTS	\$4,232,416	\$2,701,712	\$3,331,268		\$10,265,396
	SALES & SERVICE	\$630,876		\$1,145,350		\$1,776,226
	INVESTMENT INCOME	\$11,318		\$150,868		\$162,258
	CATEGORY TOTAL	\$46,730,853	\$29,861,206	\$16,081,162	\$7,398,788	\$100,072,009



STAY UP TO DATE ON WHAT WE'RE DOING

<https://tfsweb.tamu.edu/>

Established in 1915, TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE provides statewide leadership and technical assistance to ensure trees, forests and related natural resources are sustained for the benefit of all. The agency supports the state's incident response capability, protecting against wildfire and responding to a range of all-hazard incidents.



TEXAS A&M FOREST SERVICE
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Communications@tfs.tamu.edu
979.458.6606

