

**State
Forestry Division**



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MISSION: State Forestry Division (Forestry) retains lead responsibility for wildland fire management on non-federal and non-municipal lands, maintaining fire suppression capacities and emphasizing firefighter and public safety. Forestry promotes healthy, sustainable forests in New Mexico for the benefit of current and future generations.

Forestry is responsible for fire suppression on 43 million acres of non-municipal, non-federal and non-tribal land across the state and assists New Mexico communities by evaluating those most at risk to wildfire and insect infestation by developing appropriate management programs and implementing mitigation projects.

Forestry staff provides technical assistance to landowners for developing sustainable forests that enhance quality of life by providing tree care training, distributing low-cost seedlings, developing resource management plans and delivering forest health project funding.

PROGRAMS: Forestry's priority is to assist in the continued development of the forest products industry (e.g., forest harvesting, landscaping, construction, woody biomass) that uses land treatment byproducts. In addition, Forestry oversees an inmate work camp which utilizes trained minimum security inmate crews for work on conservation projects and wildland fire suppression.

Forestry regulates the harvest of commercial forest species on private forestland and conducts habitat protection projects by studying plant species abundance, defining ecosystems, acquiring easements and purchasing key properties.

Landowners and communities receive assistance with fire prevention and preparedness planning, forest management and improvement, urban and community forest development and management, conservation easement and tax incentive programs, and numerous educational presentations on these topics. Forestry works to implement projects and programs with a goal of improving overall forest and watershed health statewide.

Accomplishments

OVERVIEW: In the midst of another very active year for wildland fire, Forestry was able to help facilitate the treatment of thousands of acres of state and private land during the calendar year. These treatments are a vital tool in establishing and maintaining not only good forest and watershed health, but wildfire protection for homes and communities as well.

Countless factors play roles in New Mexico’s forest health. Although some of these factors are controllable by land managers, many are not. The largest influence over the past year was the extension of the drought that the state has experienced for the last few years.

This, in conjunction with a continued increase of insect populations from previous years, has resulted in a greater area of land impacted by detrimental forest pests. Local, state, federal and tribal lands across the state are affected. Aerial surveys conducted during the summer months indicate that more than 556,600 acres of forests and woodlands were affected by defoliators like the western tent caterpillar and western spruce budworm, an increase of about 30,000 acres from 2011. The same surveys showed 175,500 acres with some degree of tree mortality, an increase of roughly 5,500 acres over the previous year. The Sacramento Mountains continued to be a very active area for insect pest activity this year, as is expected with the current buildup of bark beetle populations. Land managers lack an easy or quick way to deal with the continued decline in forest health; at this point, substantial moisture is the greatest need.

Landowners are working toward increasing the resiliency of their properties through thinning and removing infested and susceptible trees to reduce the spread of damaging insects, mistletoe and other forest health issues. Forestry works closely with private and state land managers to ensure compliance with outlined best management practices.

The Forest Health Program goals continue to be incorporated into numerous areas of the division’s work. Many landowners and managers receive various forms of technical assistance from Forestry staff including site visits, management and project plan review and classes on forest health. The division’s Forest Health Specialist conducted aerial surveys of more than 5.1 million acres of land, and tens of thousands of acres were surveyed from the ground. These surveys look for all manners of forest health issues but focus primarily on insect and disease issues.

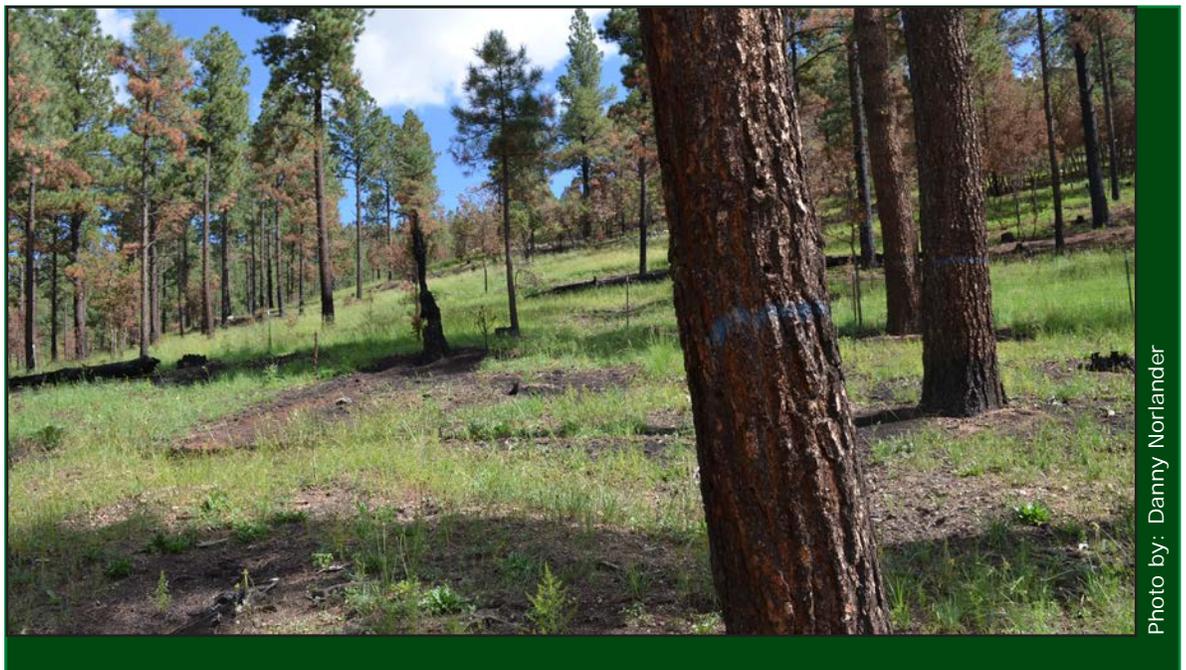


Photo by: Danny Norlander

Thinned area post Little Bear Fire – This area of the forest had been treated by mechanical thinning before the Little Bear Fire. Because of the treatment, the fire primarily moved along the forest floor rather than tree tops, which spared many of the trees and allowed for quick regeneration of native grasses following the fire.

FOREST INVENTORY ANALYSIS: A concerted effort over the past three years to collect inventory data resulted in answers to questions about such issues as wood supply, carbon storage, forest conditions prone to fire and insect outbreaks and many other natural resource concerns. The USDA Forest Service's National Forest Inventory and Analysis program serves as the nation's census of forests and woodlands. However, data collection in New Mexico was stalled to the point that, in 2009, the state requested and received an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act grant to hire contractors to fill the gap. Working in collaboration, Forest Service crews, contract foresters, as well as tribal employees, gathered data for over 5,000 plots in New Mexico on all jurisdictions – federal, state, tribal, and private. The information represents the most comprehensive data set that not only answers today's pressing questions about forest and woodland conditions, but establishes an important baseline for tracking the impacts of drought, wildfires and changing climates in the future.

FOREST AND WATERSHED HEALTH: Forestry's district offices, Inmate Work Camp Program and Forest and Watershed Health Office continued addressing issues that traditionally have been a barrier to proper treatment and land management in New Mexico through the implementation of the New Mexico Forest and Watershed Health Plan and the Statewide Natural Resource Assessment and Strategy.

In 2012, the Forest and Watershed Health Office put increased emphasis on strengthening relationships with other state and federal agencies and non-governmental partners. The office spearheaded a new Financial Assistance Agreement with the BLM and secured a two-year extension of EMNRD's Cooperative Agreement with the Natural Resources Conservation Service. Both agreements make it easier for the state and federal agencies to collaboratively plan, fund and implement on-the-ground projects that cross jurisdictional boundaries. Working together to improve forests and watersheds across a larger landscape benefits both private landowners and the public.

The Forest and Watershed Health Coordinator serves on regional and national committees that track and provide input into policies that affect how our natural resources are managed. Office staff oversaw restoration projects that treated more than 1,100 acres of forest and bosque land. They also contributed technical expertise to many boards and task teams cooperating on fire and watershed issues here in New Mexico and across the Southwest.

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY PROGRAM: Forestry's Urban and Community Forestry Program works to empower New Mexico communities to recognize and maximize the benefits from their community forests through technical assistance and support with identifying funding sources.

The Urban and Community Forestry Program saw an overall increase across the state in the number of volunteers, citizens, and communities managing or developing programs to plant, protect and maintain their urban and community trees and forests. In 2012, four communities received and implemented Community Forestry Assistance Grants to develop and strengthen urban forestry programs. Six applications were received and are being reviewed for 2013. Five communities received New Mexico Forest Re-Leaf tree planting grants. Twelve (12) communities were recognized for the national Tree City USA program and the community of Roswell was awarded the prestigious Sterling Tree City USA Award. Sixty-four (64) communities have active local advocacy/advisory organizations, such as active tree boards, commissions or non-profit organizations that are formalized or chartered to advise and/or advocate for the planting, protection and maintenance of urban and community trees and forests. Across the state, 5,624 volunteer hours have been logged related to Urban and Community Forestry and tree planting.

FIRE MANAGEMENT: The fire season in 2012, while shorter in duration and intensity than 2011, saw the largest recorded fire in state history, the 297,845-acre Whitewater Baldy Fire, as well as the most destructive fire, the Little Bear, which destroyed 254 structures. While both of these fires burned primarily on federally owned land, thousands of acres of state and private lands were affected as well and the division provided resources to aid in the fire suppression activities.

During fiscal year 2012, 707 fires burned approximately 123,447 acres of state and private land.

While human-caused fires continue to be a major concern, Forestry reports that 306 fires in fiscal year 2012 were human-caused, a significant decrease in the percentage of wildfire starts from the previous year. Equipment use and debris burning were the leading contributors. Forestry continues to work collaboratively with local, state, federal and tribal fire agencies to educate New Mexicans about fire prevention and preparedness. Wildland fire incidents are reflected in the location map in the Data and Statistics section of this report.

In fiscal year 2012, Forestry provided wildland fire training to more than 1,200 volunteer, municipal, state, federal and tribal firefighters, and provided fire training to fire and law enforcement investigators at two Wildland Fire Academies and wildland fire investigation-related courses.

Following two very destructive years for wildfire across the state, Forestry's fire prevention and education programs have been very active. The formal programs Forestry helps facilitate, Firewise Communities and Ready, Set Go!, both saw interest from communities and fire departments statewide.

Firewise Communities is a community-based and -run recognition program, focusing on residents, businesses and elected bodies working together to create cities, towns and even neighborhoods that take steps to address the issue of wildfire risk. To date, 13 active Firewise Communities Programs operate around New Mexico, and four more communities are in the process of gaining formal recognition from the national Firewise Program.

Flames taken during the Little Bear Fire near Ruidoso, NM during the summer of 2012.



Photo by: Danny Norlander

Ready, Set Go!, a sister-program to Firewise, focuses on being prepared both inside and outside the home for the eventuality of wildfire. Residents work with Forestry and their local municipal or county fire departments and emergency management offices to become better prepared should a wildfire approach their community. There are currently more than 30 New Mexico local, state, federal and tribal agencies partnered with the Ready, Set Go! Program.

Information about these programs and Forestry's other wildfire education can be found on the division's website: www.nmforestry.com.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION: Forestry works with private landowners, state and federal agencies to protect land from future development that could fragment the landscape. Through various incentive programs, landowners can place large tracts of land into conservation easements that allow them to retain ownership while protecting it.

Sixty-four (64) new or revised forest stewardship and treatment plans were prepared in 2012 for a total of 4,969 acres on private forested land in New Mexico. In addition to this, 434 landowners received technical assistance on their private forest lands, with an additional 915 landowners participating in educational programs related to forest stewardship, fire prevention and forest management.

CONSERVATION SEEDLING PROGRAM: The Forestry Conservation Seedling Program provides economically priced tree and shrub species to New Mexico landowners for the establishment of windbreaks, erosion control, crop and livestock protection, Christmas tree farm establishment, energy cost savings and landscape aesthetics. In 2012, the Conservation Seedling Program distributed 105,553 seedlings through sales during the New Mexico State Fair, New Mexico Agriculture Expo, educational donations and the spring and fall distribution cycles.

THE ENDANGERED PLANTS PROGRAM: Forestry has statutory responsibility for the State Endangered Plant Species List. Section 75-6-1 NMSA 1978 directs the investigation of all plant species in the state for the purpose of establishing a list of endangered plant species.

In this capacity, Forestry gathers information related to population abundance, distribution, habitat requirements, threats, limiting factors and other biological and ecological data to determine the status of an endangered species. The information is used to develop conservation measures necessary for the species' survival. The statute further directs Forestry to establish a program to promote the conservation of listed endangered plant species including research, inventory and monitoring, law enforcement, habitat maintenance, education, and propagation. Currently, New Mexico has 37 plant species that are listed as endangered, including 13 federally listed species.

The Endangered Plant Program is primarily federally funded through Section 6 of the Endangered Species Act for endangered plant research and management. In 2011/2012, endangered plant projects included the annual monitoring and status evaluation of Knowlton's Cactus and the Holy Ghost Ipomopsis and status reports on the Acoma Fleabane and the Cloudcroft Phacelia.

LAND CONSERVATION TAX INCENTIVE PROGRAM: In 2012, Forestry received and processed 12 Assessment Applications for the Land Conservation Incentive Act Tax Credit Program. All applications were approved to move forward to the Certification Application phase. Currently, four applications are with the New Mexico Department of Taxation and Revenue's Property Appraisal Review Division awaiting final certification for a tax credit. To date, 11 applicants received certification awarding more than \$2.17 million in tax credits on a total appraised land value of over \$5.11 million for 7,713 acres.

INMATE WORK CAMP PROGRAM: Forestry's Inmate Work Camp Program was established in 1997 for the purpose of conducting forest health/urban interface projects on public land in New Mexico. The crews are also trained to conduct wildfire suppression activities and function as an efficient, cost effective resource for New Mexico.

In cooperation with the New Mexico Corrections Department, the inmate crews comprise 12 minimum security inmates; each crew is transported to project areas and supervised by one Forestry Division Crew Supervisor. The program has the ability to field six crews per workday throughout the year and is based in Los Lunas at the state's minimum security prison facility. This year the program provided crews from the Los Lunas Inmate Work Camp to work on 10 projects for 10 different local, state, federal and private co-operators, performing 1,190 man-days of work and 13,000 man-hours of work. Crews were assigned to 36 wildfires, performing 256 crew-days of fire suppression.



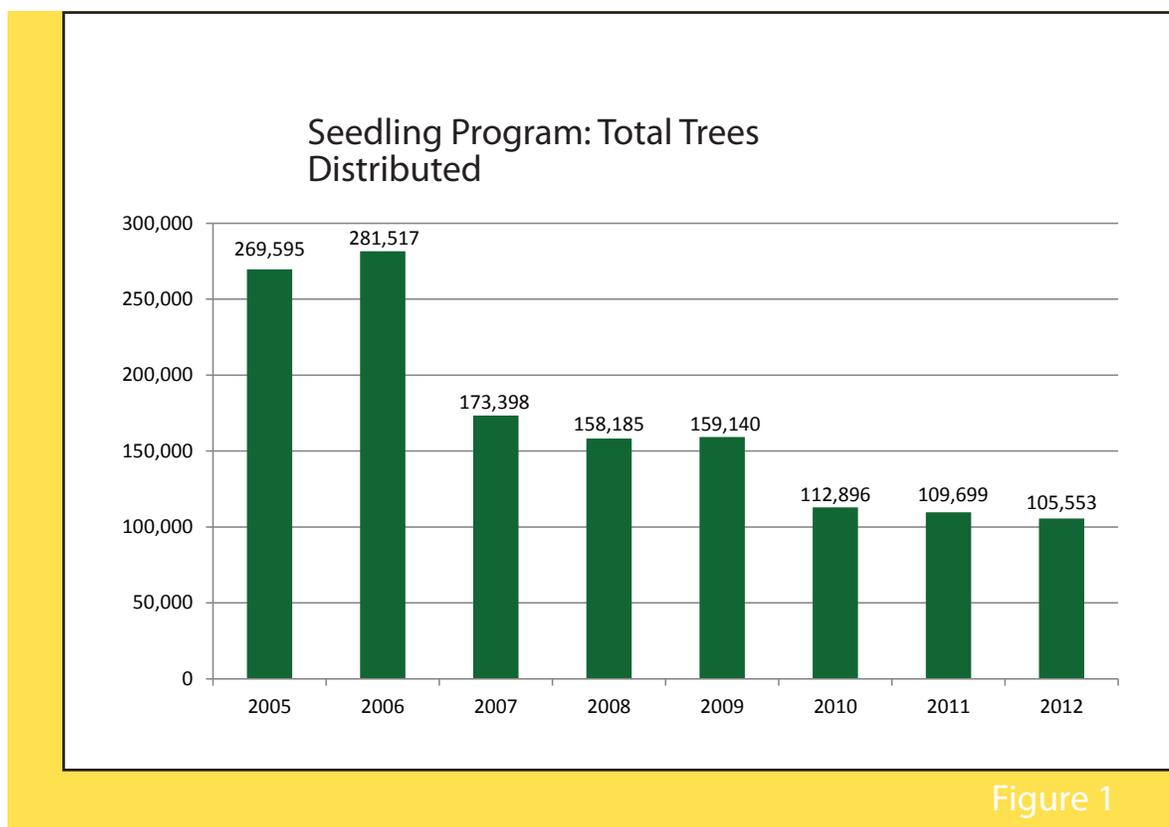
Photo by: Daniela Roth

Wright's Marsh
Thistle at Blue Hole
Cienega Preserve,
2012.

Data and Statistics

2012 SEEDLING CHART:

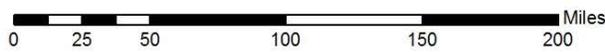
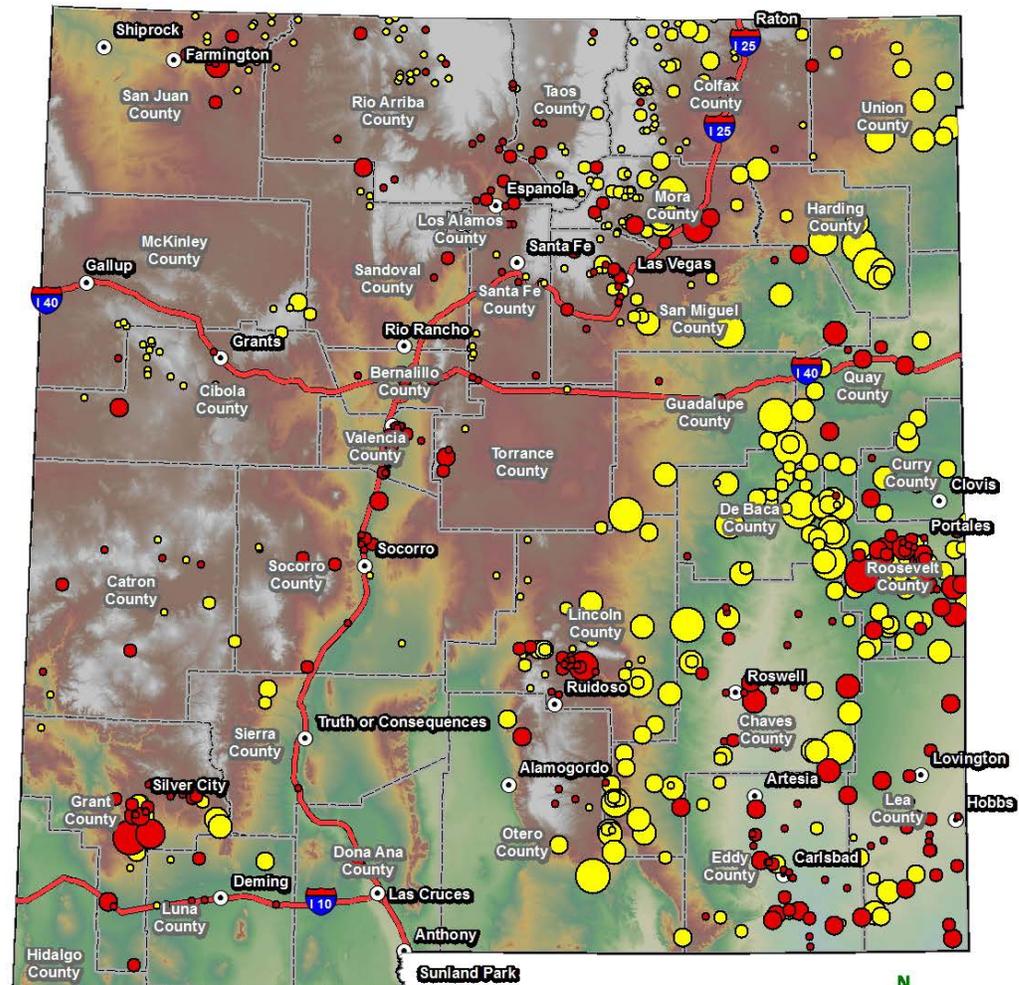
Forestry's Conservation Seedling Program provides landowners the ability to take advantage of fall and spring planting seasons with two distribution periods. With the combined distribution periods, 105,553 tree seedlings were distributed through the program's annual sales, sales at the New Mexico Agriculture Expo and New Mexico State Fair and through educational donations.



2012 FIRE MAP: Fire season 2012 saw more acres burn across New Mexico than any year in recent history. During fiscal year 2012, 707 fires were reported on state and private land. These fires burned 123,447 acres. Total number of acres burned, including federal land, totaled 596,857.



New Mexico Wildfires On State and Private Lands FY 2012



Cause	# of Fires	Acres Burned
● Human Caused	302	9,554 ac.
● Natural Caused	405	518,815 ac.

2012 RE-LEAF GRANTS: Forestry's New Mexico Forest Re-Leaf Program awarded \$25,925 in grant funding to the communities of Carrizozo, Raton, Rio Rancho, Santa Fe and Taos. The program aids communities by providing funds for tree planting for conservation purposes, educational outreach, windbreak establishment and general aesthetic enhancement. Re-Leaf grants are funded completely through corporate and private donors. Since 1990, more than \$560,000 has been distributed to New Mexico communities for tree planting.

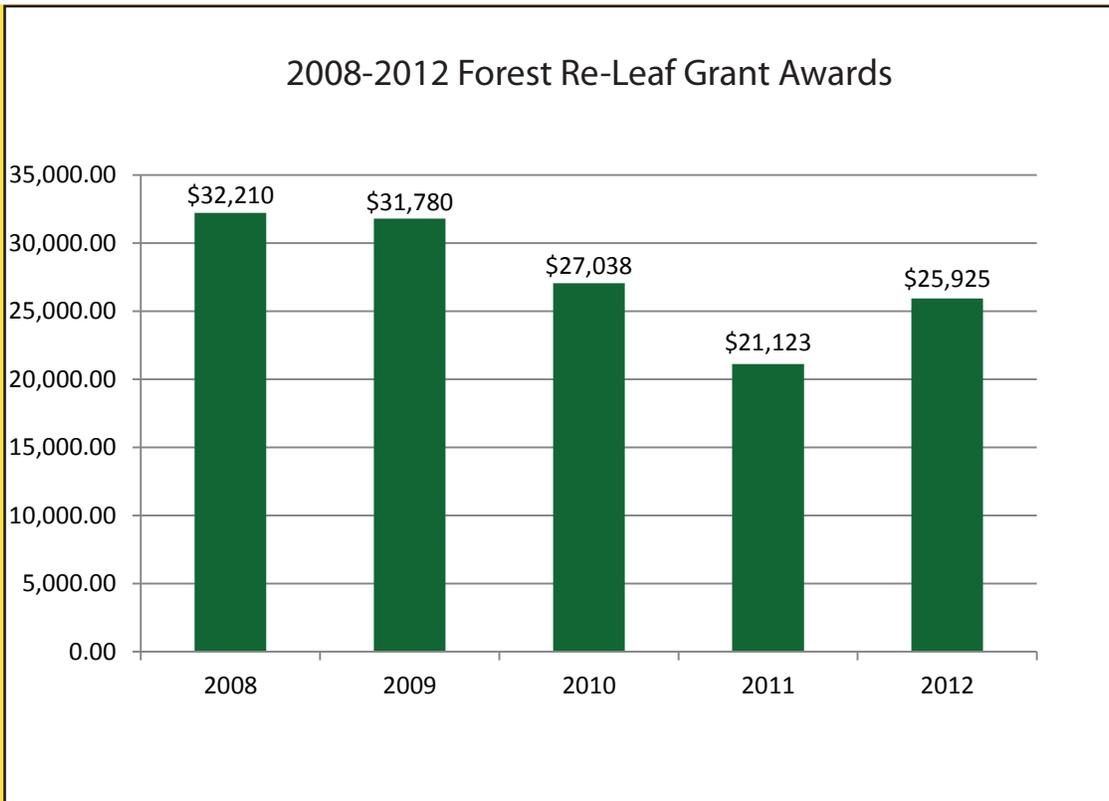


Figure 2

