

News Release

October 24, 2024 – The Arizona Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), in partnership with Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever (PFQF), the Arizona Game and Fish Department (AZGFD), and the Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management (DFFM), is excited to announce a recent award of \$24.5 million through the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP).

This landscape-level restoration project, spanning approximately 35,000 acres of range and forest within the Colorado River Basin, focuses on working closely with producers to restore native plant communities by implementing climate-smart practices, including invasive woody species removal.

“The funding secured through this partnership will support the treatment of grasslands and overstocked woodlands to restore natural conditions within critical wildlife movement corridors and winter habitat for Arizona’s wildlife,” said Dan Sturla, AZGFD Landowner Relations and Habitat Enhancement Program Manager. “Delivery of conservation at this scale is rarely possible and would not have been if not for the dedication and hard work of the partners involved in this project.”

“The scale of this grant and the strength of the partnership will provide an immediate and lasting benefit for producers, wildlife, and sportsmen and women throughout the State,” stated Scott Poppenberger, PF Southwest State Coordinator. “Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever, the Habitat Organization, are thrilled to be a partner in the delivery of this incredible funding award.” Furthermore, practices will help reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, increase resilience to extreme weather events, protect soils, improve water quality and hydrology, and may restore carbon stocks.

“It is essential that we look at Arizona’s working lands at a landscape level,” says AACD Executive Director Deborrah Smith. “Land managers across the state face the same daily concerns around soil health and water conservation. This exciting project promotes practices that benefit both agriculture and wildlife, underscoring Arizona’s Conservation Districts’ commitment to climate-smart solutions.”

John Richardson, Assistant State Forester (Forestry Program), Arizona DFFM, agrees that this RCPP project will support conservation of Arizona’s forest lands: “This RCPP project directly aligns with our vision of an Arizona in which the people are protected from the threat of fire and whose diverse landscapes are healthy. This project will significantly enhance our ongoing efforts to improve forest and watershed health and reduce wildfire risk in the Colorado Basin.”

This project demonstrates the power of partnerships in advancing sustainable land management across Arizona. Collaboration between a diverse group of land managers will help support healthier ecosystems, conserve vital natural resources, and provide lasting benefits for wildlife, agriculture, and communities throughout the state.