

California Reforestation Pipeline Partnership as a Model for Capacity Building

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California is currently facing a major need for reforestation following the large-scale, highly destructive wildfires of the last decade. Challenges to meeting their reforestation needs include shortage of trained personnel in all aspects of reforestation, a lack of quality seed for many areas, access to productive seed sources, limited capacity for seed processing and storage, and inadequate nursery growing space.

One major tool in meeting the state's reforestation needs is a collaborative partnership dubbed [The Reforestation Pipeline Partnership](#), a strategic collaboration between the USDA Forest Service Region 5, the California Department of Forestry and Fire

Protection (CAL FIRE) and American Forests to identify and address pinch points in the supply chain that enables reforestation. This partnership provides a forum for developing cooperative reforestation strategies, and forming the cross-boundary relationships needed to bring all of the elements of the reforestation pipeline together. They offer quarterly in person meetings, and huddles to pursue topics of interest to partnership participants. The program's manager, Shelley Villalobos describes the quarterly meetings as an opportunity for all of the groups that touch reforestation in California to come together in person to build the connections needed to tackle the complex issues associated with increasing the pace and scale of

reforestation in a changing climate. From these quarterly meetings, topics like organizing an all-comers cone collection training, creating new reporting infrastructure for seed surveys, increasing cross-boundary seed collection and sharing activity, and climate smart reforestation guidelines have all been taken up by the subgroups called huddles.

The partnership has also started the California Cone Corps, which is a workforce development program that intends to train new technicians on all aspects of the reforestation pipeline. Individuals hired through this initiative are placed with partner organizations including CAL FIRE and the US Forest Service to support their



Day 2 of Cone Camp in the Mountain Home Demonstration Forest. Photo Credit: Mark Janzen

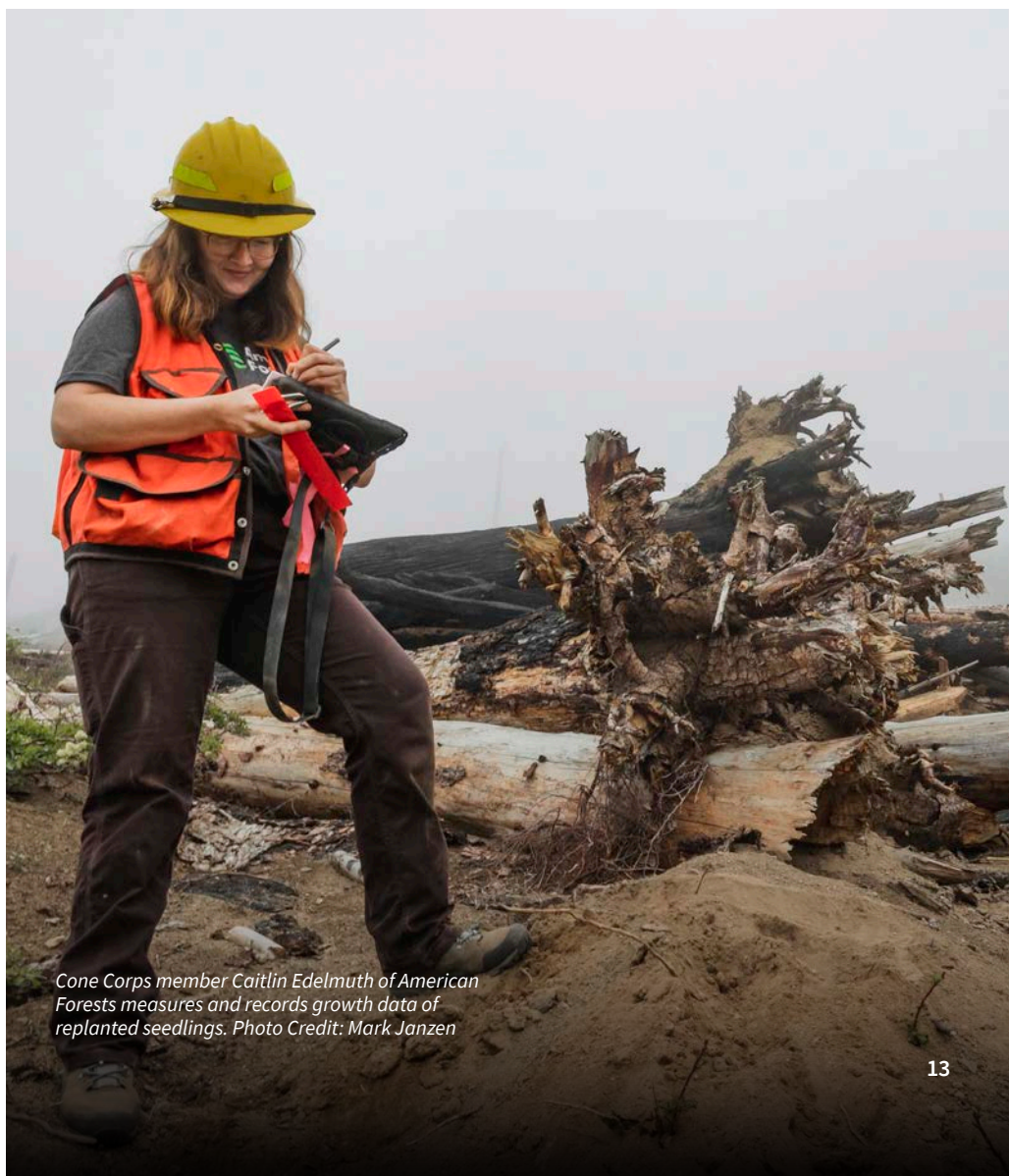
nurseries, seed orchards, and the forests themselves. The program's goal is to fill critical workforce gaps while training individuals to fill important management roles in the reforestation pipeline in the future. Cone Corps members are trained to implement and manage projects including cone surveys and collection, reviving seed orchards, working at reforestation nurseries, and more. According to Cone Corps project manager Bridget Mulkerin, the program has grown from 4 to 20 individual positions in just a year. "These positions are filling capacity gaps within our partner organizations," says Mulkerin. "Several positions have been extended beyond the original appointment, and 4 of our Cone Corps members have been offered full time positions by their site organizations after their term ended."

Additionally, CAL FIRE has made significant investments into its [Reforestation Services Program](#) to help meet the state's needs. Its nursery is working to increase capacity to produce 1 million forest seedlings per year — a 300% increase from the current capacity. This will still fall short of total seedling needs to address the reforestation backlog, but is a move in the right direction. The agency has also developed a funding mechanism dubbed the Emergency Forest Restoration Team (EFRT), which was created in the wake of the Dixie and Caldor Fires to get funds directed to on the ground efforts as soon as possible after fire moves through the landscape. The program pre-identifies funds, in partnership with local Resource Conservation Districts, which become available for the assessment and stabilization work necessary in the weeks and months after fires are suppressed. This strategy is important for funding time-sensitive work before agency budgets can respond or grants can be sought and awarded.

Investments like these are vital to meeting reforestation and restoration needs. The constraints in California are not unique, and other groups may look to the cooperative models that they have developed to build capacity and address the growing complexities of forest management as our climate changes.



Cone Corps member Noé Romo Loera of American Forests staking trees for monitoring future growth. Photo Credit: Mark Janzen



Cone Corps member Caitlin Edelmuth of American Forests measures and records growth data of replanted seedlings. Photo Credit: Mark Janzen