



## **Texas A&M Forest Service Strategic Communications Plan 2018-2021**

*Incorporates Texas A&M Forest Service Strategic Plan, Texas Forest Action Plan and the Texas Wildfire Protection Plan Priorities and Objectives*

### **Mission:**

Texas A&M Forest Service provides statewide leadership to assure the state's trees, forests and related natural resources are protected and sustained for the benefit of all.

### **Vision:**

Conserve - Texas A&M Forest Service will ensure the state's forests, trees and related natural resources are conserved and provide a sustainable flow of environmental and economic benefits today and for future generations.

Protect - Texas A&M Forest Service will be the lead agency for the state for all-hazard responses, including the suppression of wildfires and the management of state disasters.

Lead - Texas A&M Forest Service will employ and depend upon a dedicated, well-trained workforce of leaders. We will be recognized as "standard-setters," because many agency employees are selected for key leadership positions in local, state, and national organizations.

### **A Call to Service:**

As a service agency within a land-grant university system, Texas A&M Forest Service has a responsibility to provide readily-available and easily-understandable technical assistance, program delivery and science-based information to the people we serve.

### **Purpose:**

The purpose of the TFS Strategic Communications Plan is to serve as a guidance document on how the agency will approach, prioritize and deliver communications projects, efforts and training in support of the agency's Mission, Vision and Call.

### **Agency Priority 1: *Conserve and protect working forest landscapes and enhance benefits associated with trees and forests.***

#### **Objective 1:**

Conserve working forest landscapes and their benefits by reducing the rate of conversion to other, non-forested uses.

#### **Objective 2:**

Enhance and promote the suite of public and private quality of life benefits associated with trees and forests. These benefits include increasing renewable materials (bioenergy, building materials, paper products), promoting economic attributes (employment, enhanced property values, reduced heating and cooling costs), and contributing to social values (drinking water filtration, reduced flood risk and impact, clean air and water, buffering of climate change, open space protection, fish/wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, conservation education).

**Communications Objectives:**

- Position Texas A&M Forest Service as the premier forestry resource in the state, region and nation.
- Communicate directly with key audiences regarding the benefits of conserving healthy forest landscapes
- Train/inform/assist Texas A&M Forest Service personnel on how to effectively communicate key urban and rural forest and tree management messages

***Agency Priority 2: Protect the lives, property and natural resources of Texans from harm resulting from wildland fires, disease, insects and non-native invasive species and natural or human-caused disasters.***

Objective 1:

Protect the state from the damaging effects of wildland fires through implementation of the TWPP.

Objective 2:

Enhance Texas A&M Forest Service's ability to serve as the state's Incident Management agency as directed by the State Emergency Management Plan to respond to all significant natural and human-caused disasters occurring in Texas.

Objective 3:

Protect forests, community trees and related natural resources from harm by reducing threats to forest health and productivity associated with wildfire, disease, insects and non-native invasive species.

Objective 4:

Strengthen the agency's reputation across all programs as the trusted source of information to the public, local government, elected officials and decision makers.

**Communications Objectives:**

- Position Texas A&M Forest Service as the premier forestry, wildfire and incident management resource in the state, region and nation
- Educate "environmental changers" (cooperators) on wildfire mitigation, fuel reduction methods and community wildfire protection planning
- Increase landowners' awareness of forest pest and disease prevention methods and wildfire prevention

***Agency Priority 3: Increase the effectiveness of Texas A&M Forest Service programs through improved resources, planning and development.***

Objective 1:

Strengthen internal agency communications to promote a positive agency culture, cohesiveness and pride in service.

Objective 2:

Hire and develop employees to meet the increased and changing needs of the agency and strive to provide each employee with challenging and fulfilling employment.

Objective 3:

Develop and maintain an effective level of institutional infrastructure that utilizes up to date technology.

**Communications Objectives:**

- Strengthen internal communications to promote a positive agency culture, cohesiveness and pride
- Develop internal training and working groups to maximize employee abilities in communications and interrelation
- Ensure staff, through personal conduct and communications products, promotes diversity and cultural respect
- Support the recruitment and retention of quality employees
- Capitalize on and maximize use of new media and emerging technology

**2018-2019 Strategies and Priorities**

**Situational Overview**

Texas is a large, geographically and culturally diverse state. It is the second most populous state in the US with an estimated 28.5 million people (2017) and has seen strong population growth in recent decades. While not extreme, the state does contain significant variations in culture, language, economic status, education, lifestyle, age and other demographics.

Much of the population growth in the state is occurring adjacent to metropolitan areas. Development of homes and communities in previously undeveloped areas is increasing Wildland Urban Interface (WUI), impacting both wildfire risk and environmental health.

As a public service agency tasked with delivery of the land-grant university mission, the ability to effectively communicate with the public is an essential, functional necessity for TFS.

**Planning Assumptions**

Agency fiscal, personnel and related resources are expected to remain relatively constant for the duration of this planning cycle.

The availability and widespread use of social media and other modern communications tools enables communication with larger groups than ever before.

As foresters, land management professionals and wildland firefighters, many TFS personnel are not trained in (or particularly comfortable with) serving as professional communicators.

It is not feasible to expect the agency communications staff to become subject matter experts on all areas impacted by the agency.

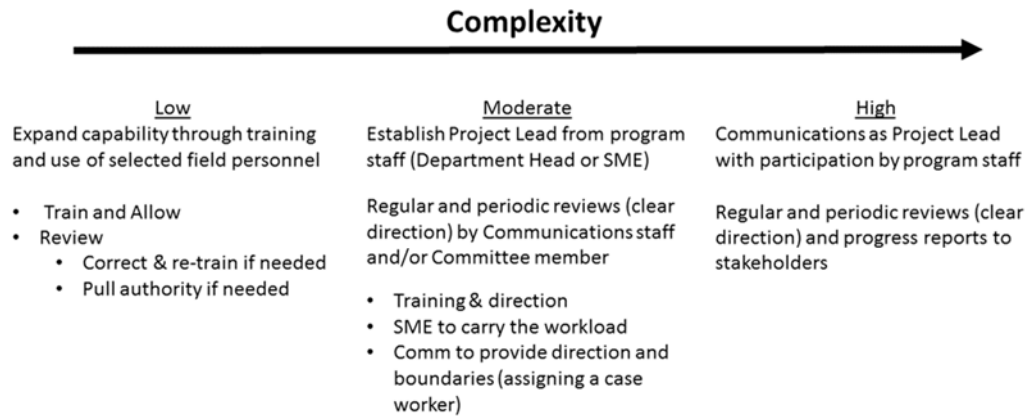
Increased coordination and interaction between program staff (SME's and delivery) and communications specialists can help expand this capability.

As a small agency with limited resources, effective prioritization, management and follow-through are also essential.

**Operations & Prioritization**

To better facilitate coordination, interaction and active participation in the communications function, agency leadership has updated the responsibilities and membership of the Communications & Marketing Advisory Committee (Administrative Procedures 70.01).

The Committee has established the following framework to help 1) prioritize communications efforts, 2) increase agency involvement in the delivery of quality communications products and 3) allow communications staff to focus on higher complexity projects:



For this planning cycle, the Communications group's (committee and staff) initial focus will be on:

- Identifying and training working teams for field delivery of local communications functions (low complexity)
- Developing guidance documents and quality control measures for team operations (low complexity)
- Implementing local communications functions through designated field personnel (low complexity)
- Cross-communications, storage, access and retrieval of communications products
- Developing processes for requesting, prioritizing, selecting, monitoring and delivering moderate and high complexity communications projects
- Increasing agency cohesion, employee understanding of programs and positive internal interaction through use of internal communication tools

- Promoting internal awareness and consistent messaging of TFS legislative process and exceptional items

Additional items may be added to this list during this planning cycle as development and implementation under this updated structure continue to evolve.