

CALIFORNIA FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM



Forestland
STEWARD

REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

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An Introduction to Southern California

California is a state of forests, from the towering redwoods of the North Coast, to the live oak woodlands of Central California, to the ancient bristlecones of the White Mountains. For the next two issues of the Forestland Steward Newsletter, we will be highlighting regional history and challenges facing forestland owners in Southern and Central California (see our [previous issue](#) for a focus on Northern California). For the purposes of this issue, Southern California will be considered the region encompassed by the map in Figure 1, adapted from the California Climate and Ag Network's [regional map](#).

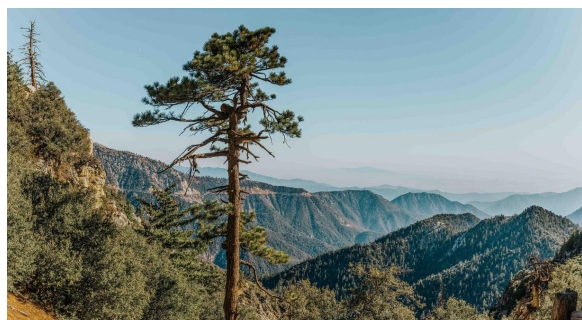
Southern California features an ecologically rich and **varied landscape**, including mountains, coastline, deserts, and urban centers. While palm trees and Joshua trees (neither of which is technically classified as a tree) may be what comes to mind when one

thinks of the region, the southern part of the state features millions of acres of national forest, thousands of acres of wildland-urban interface (WUI), and massive swaths of urban tree coverage. Oak woodlands, shrub-heavy chaparral, montane forests, and riparian woodlands make up the non-desert areas of Southern California, with pinyon-juniper desert montane and desert landscapes comprising the more inland regions. Southern California, like the rest of the state, seems to have it all.

In this region, 3.5 million acres of National Forests bleed directly into urban areas, transitioning quickly from private forested lands into city centers. **8% of the United States' population** lives within one hour of either the Los Padres, Angeles, or Cleveland National Forests. Los Angeles and San Diego contain the largest WUI area in the state, according to a recent [mapping study](#), with 1,400 and 1,909 acres classified as WUI, respectively. The connection between people and forests in Southern California, while perhaps surprising, is undeniable.



FIGURE 1
CALIFORNIA'S
REGIONS



Angeles National Forest
Courtesy of California.com

Southern California may not have the robust and divisive forestry history of the northern redwoods, but it has had its share of misguided decisions and inspiring efforts. In the late 1800's, mining, historical logging practices, overgrazing, and wildfire had heavily degraded the San Gabriel Mountains above Los Angeles, resulting in substantial erosion and flooding. Chairman of the California Board of Forestry, Abbot Kinney, advocated for the protection of this region and its watersheds, ultimately resulting in the creation of the Angeles National Forest in 1892 (originally named the San Gabriel Timberland Preserve). Fellow conservationist Theodore Lukens worked to reforest the area by opening a tree nursery at Henniger Flats and planting thousands of ponderosa and knobcone pine.

The impacts of historic logging efforts and natural low density of hardwoods in the region resulted in a new issue: the now-omnipresent eucalyptus. A number of farmers sought to create a **local timber supply**, and imported the eucalyptus (native to Australia and well-suited to Southern California's Mediterranean climate) to serve as a fast-growing timber tree that could bolster the local market. Abbot Kinney took up this cause in his position as state forester, ultimately transforming California's landscape forever. While indeed fast-growing, eucalyptus trees have zero value as a building material due to wood that cracks and warps as it dries. As a result, eucalyptus trees remained unharvested and now dominate much of Southern California and beyond, creating a substantial fire hazard with their oil-rich leaves and bark.

Southern California carries a legacy of conservation, exotic (and sometimes misguided) landscaping, and urban centers. It also faces the ongoing threat and impact of catastrophic wildfire. In January of 2025, 14 wildfires (the largest of which were the **Eaton** and **Palisades** fires) destroyed over 18,000 structures and claimed 31 lives over the course of 24 days in the Los Angeles area. Survivors are now faced with rebuilding and identifying the resources they need, while agencies are taking **lessons** from the fires. In this issue, we'll learn what it's like to be an urban forester in Southern California, take a peek at lumber acquisition and processing in an urban setting, better understand permitting and when one needs a Registered Professional Forester for land management, and gain insight into what to do with your home and property following a wildfire.



Smoke in aftermath of Eaton Fire
Kyle Grillot/Bloomberg via Getty Images



Angel City Lumber

URBAN FORESTRY IN LOS ANGELES

When a tree falls in a Los Angeles neighborhood, it has a future beyond woodchips. Whether it's been removed from a city corner in Los Angeles or part of fuels reduction efforts in the Angeles National Forest, that tree may have the fortune of being taken in by **Angel City Lumber**. Angel City Lumber was founded in 2015 by Jeff Perry, who saw the potential in a large oak that had fallen in Eaton Canyon. Since then, the company has expanded and formed partnerships throughout Los Angeles with a focus on giving dead urban trees a new life.

Once in the company's hands, locally salvaged trees are cut into logs and marked with a code indicating their neighborhood or forest of origin, species, and date of harvest. This number stays with the tree all the way to the purchase of the end product, whether that's a table, chairs, or a custom project. "Upon purchase, everyone is privy to the tree's origin story," states Angel City's website.

Beyond the mission of sustainability and the feel-good nature of saving downed neighborhood trees from the chipper, Angel City Lumber has had a real impact in recovery efforts following 2025's **Eaton Fire**.

After the Eaton Fire destroyed over 4,000 single-family homes and burned 14,021 acres in and around the community of Altadena, survivors were left with devastation, questions, and the daunting – and sometimes impossible – prospect of rebuilding. Seeing the need and joining a cavalcade of other support efforts, Angel City Lumber launched the Altadena Reciprocity Project and Community Wood Bank. Thousands of local trees were killed in the fire, and Angel City Lumber created a system in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers to safely harvest, process, and transport these logs to be processed into millwork lumber. The resulting lumber can be used for flooring, cabinet fronts, casing, moulding, trim, and more – and is reserved exclusively for Altadena residents.

Best of all, Angel City Lumber is not alone in processing neighborhood trees.

PLEASE DON'T PART WAYS
WITH YOUR TREE
UNCEREMONIOUSLY!

We know how devastating it can be to lose a tree you're close to, and we share our deepest sympathy with you.

There may be a way to honor your fallen friend by utilizing the wood in your home or business. From your tree, let's explore making decking, flooring, benches, stools, or other possibilities!

Angel City Lumber is an urban Lumberyard that transforms fallen trees into usable lumber, extending the functional life of your tree.

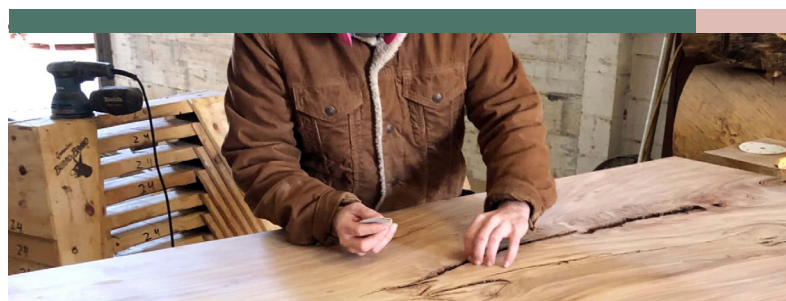


HONORING THE TREES
OF LOS ANGELES



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None of us make it out of here alive, including our tree friends!
Let us help their legacy live on!



Throughout Southern California, dead and dying trees are meeting productive and beneficial ends – and staying out of landfills. Like Angel City Lumber, **West Coast Arborists** has a program called Street Tree Revival™, which mills street trees of high quality or fine character into slabs. Those that don't make it to the sawmill are turned into mulch for city parks and schools, or are cut into seasoned firewood. Similarly, the **Conservation Corps of Long Beach** operates an urban lumber yard and mill for locally salvaged wood and offers workforce training in milling, chainsaw operation, and sustainable forestry practices. Both of these programs are funded by CAL FIRE's Urban and Community Forestry Program.

With the widespread challenge of what to do with fire-killed trees throughout the state, it's heartening to see processing efforts that benefit the community and create something beautiful, even if it's on a small scale.

Left: Angel City Lumber Mill. Top: Tree Recovery Flyer
Bottom: Angel City Lumber Products

Do I Really Need an RPF?

DEMYSTIFYING **PERMITTING** & **REGULATIONS**

GUEST AUTHOR **DANIELLE LINDLER**

California's Professional Foresters Law was enacted in 1972 and took effect on January 1, 1973. Its purpose was simple but important: protect the state's forest resources by ensuring that anyone managing forested landscapes meets professional standards. With this law, the Registered Professional Forester (RPF) credential was created.

What The Law Requires

Under the Professional Foresters Law (Public Resources Code §750 et seq.):

- Anyone who calls themselves a professional forester or performs work in that capacity must be a Registered Professional Forester
- "Practice of forestry" covers a wide range of activities of forested landscapes, including:
 - o Fuels management and forest protection
 - o Timber growing, harvesting, and utilization
 - o Forest inventories, economics, valuation, and finance
 - o Evaluating and mitigating environmental, watershed, and scenic impacts of forest activities

A "Forested Landscape" means those tree-dominated landscapes and their associated vegetation types, of which there is a growing significant stand of tree species or which are naturally capable of growing a significant stand of native trees in perpetuity, and is not otherwise devoted to non-forestry commercial, urban, or farming uses.

When a RPF is Required

Most forest management activities, especially those with environmental or commercial implications, require oversight or direct involvement of an RPF. This includes:

- Developing forest management plans on forested landscapes, such as management plans on private land for NRCS funding
- Preparing and submitting Timber Harvest Plans (THPs), NTMPS, WFMPs, 1038 exemptions, 1104 permits, and/or 1052 emergency permits for commercial timber operations (including selling, bartering, or trading timber)
- Conducting evaluations, consultations, investigations, or planning that influence forest resources, ecology, or environmental conditions (Any CEQA project on "Forested Landscapes")
- Supervising forestry activities that may impact forested landscapes

Both public and private foresters must be licensed when making determinations about mitigating impacts from forestry activities.

Are There Any Exceptions?

There are limited exceptions. For example, a landowner (as a natural person) may conduct certain non commercial activities on their own property without a RPF license. However, most plans or exemptions submitted to CAL FIRE or other agencies still require preparation by a RPF—except in specific conversion related cases.

Becoming an RPF

To qualify for registration, applicants must meet the following requirements:

- Seven years of qualifying forestry experience, including at least three years in charge of work or under the supervision of a RPF
- Good moral character and a reputation of honesty and integrity
- Passing a comprehensive written exam (passing with a 75% or greater)
- Relevant education—such as a Bachelor of Science in Forestry—may substitute for up to four years of the experience requirement.

LEARN MORE

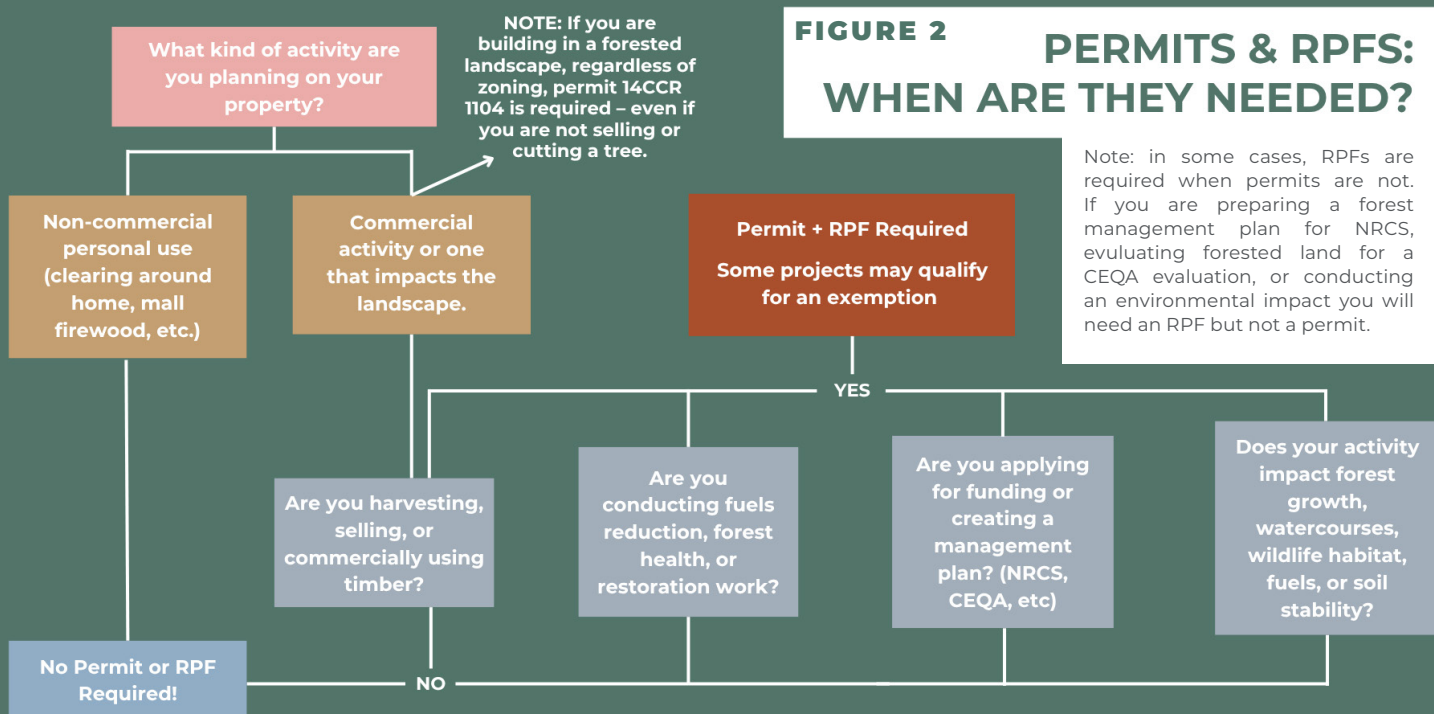
For official information, including regulations, guidance, and a roster of licensed RPFs, visit the **Board of Forestry and Fire Protection**:

<https://bof.fire.ca.gov/projects-and-programs/professional-foresters-registration/>



California Licensed Foresters Association

FIGURE 2 PERMITS & RPFs: WHEN ARE THEY NEEDED?





Careers in Forestry

A **DAY IN THE LIFE** SERIES

Henry Herrera is CAL FIRE's Southern California Urban Forestry Supervisor

RPF #2936

Can you tell us a bit about your background and how you became interested in a career in urban forestry?

As an inner-city child from Southeast San Diego, my interaction with nature was limited to my yard, gardening, and Balboa Park. After a sixth grade camping trip to the Cleveland National Forest, I was determined to go back to the forest one day. When my high school counselor asked me what I wanted to study in college, I responded that I liked gardening and that I wanted to study something related to nature. She suggested majors like botany, agriculture, and biology. However, it wasn't until I was looking through my sister's Cal Poly San Luis Obispo course catalog that I came across the Forestry and Natural Resources Major and Urban Forestry Concentration. I figured that this was the perfect solution for me to return to the forest while still being linked to my urban upbringing. As an undergraduate at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo I started working for the San Bernardino National Forest as a wildland firefighter and forester trainee during the summers. After graduation, I worked for the United States Forest Service for eight years, during which time I became a Registered Professional Forester. In 2014 I became the CAL FIRE San Bernardino Unit Forester and in 2019 I started working in CAL FIRE's Urban and Community Forestry Program in the Los Angeles area. I am now the CAL FIRE Southern California Urban Forestry Supervisor and a Certified Arborist.

What does a day in the life look like for you?

In my current role, a lot of my time is spent reviewing grant agreements, invoices, and budgets. I also take part in the development of urban forestry projects involving schoolyard greening, tree planting, Urban Forest Management Plans, urban forestry education, workforce development, and urban wood. Project site visits, tree inspections, interacting with the public, and attending community events are my favorite things to do. Occasionally, I come across vehicle accidents and render aid. I also go on fire assignments as a Public Information Officer, suppression repair specialist, or take on bilingual assignments where I get to use my Spanish speaking skills. I am also part of the Placer Resource Conservation District Forestry & Natural Resources Career Mentorship Program Steering Committee and I mentor college students to help them achieve their career goals.

In what context might a private landowner work with an urban forester, if any? How does one find an urban forester?

CAL FIRE's Urban and Community Forestry Program provides urban forestry technical assistance to anyone including, but not limited to, residents, municipalities, special districts, Native American tribes, and nonprofit organizations. We also fund urban forestry projects that are community driven and provide urban forestry education and information. One of the most common reasons residents reach out to us is to evaluate the health of a tree and help them make a decision on how to best care for it. We also

help residents choose the right tree for the right place. We can provide resources on tree care including tree planting, pruning, and watering. You can find your nearest CAL FIRE Urban Forester online: <https://www.fire.ca.gov/what-we-do/natural-resource-management/urban-and-community-forestry>.

Does urban forestry translate or interface with wildland forestry? If so, how?

Urban forestry is interfacing with wildland forestry more and more as more development occurs adjacent to the wildlands and forest boundaries. In 2025, we saw the Palisades Fire and Eaton Fire in Los Angeles County start in the Wildland Urban Interface and burn several miles into the urban communities of Pacific Palisades and Altadena. In urban areas, most trees are irrigated so they don't tend to fuel fires the same way trees do in the wildlands. In the Eaton and Palisades fires, the fire spread from structure to structure and trees and vegetation actually helped stop the spread of the fires since they had moisture and they acted as wind breaks to help slow the spread of embers. If you drive around the fire affected communities, many trees are still alive even though the structures burned.

What is the importance of urban forestry?

95% of Californians live in urban areas. Urban forestry, per the California Urban Forestry Act of 1978, is defined as the cultivation and management of native or introduced trees and related vegetation in urban areas for their present and potential contribution to the economic, physiological, sociological, and ecological well-being of urban society. Trees are a vital resource in the urban environment and an important psychological link with nature. Trees improve air quality, soil quality, water quality, wildlife habitat, improve property values, attract business, reduce stress, and provide many more benefits. In short, trees provide environmental, economic, social, and health benefits.

Is interest in the field of urban forestry growing? Are more folks needed?

Interest is growing, but most people are still unaware of urban forestry. As urban populations increase, there is a greater need for more people to become urban foresters, arborists, tree care workers, and serve in other roles that help manage our urban forests.

If someone wanted to pursue a career in urban forestry, what tips or insight would you give them?

I would suggest studying forestry, arboriculture, or a related field, and I'd suggest becoming a Certified Arborist. Joining professional organizations such as the Western Chapter of International Society of Arboriculture is a great way to build relationships with people in the industry, learn about upcoming training opportunities, and find out about job openings.

Last of all, what is your favorite part of the work you do, and why is this an important career?

My favorite part of the work I do is helping people and the environment. As an urban forester, I get to help people achieve their academic and career goals by providing them with guidance, workforce development opportunities, and job opportunities. The partners, communities, and people I get to work with on a daily basis have been very inspiring. There are many people who recognize the importance of our urban forests and want to do their part to maintain it. That is very rewarding.

What to do After a Wildfire

The to-dos, packing lists, and resources of wildfire evacuation are well-documented. If you need to get out, odds are you have a plan, a route, and a means to escape. Entities like CAL FIRE and your local Office of Emergency Services provide excellent information for the before and during of a wildfire in California – but what do you do when it's over and you were one of the unlucky ones?

Following the Palisades and Eaton fires in early 2025, this was a question approximately 13,000 homeowners faced. How do you rebuild? What resources exist to help you? Where do you begin?

Entities such as the **California Environmental Protection Agency**, **California Office of Emergency Services** (Cal OES), and **local/county Offices of Emergency Services** offer resources for people who have been impacted by wildfire. These resources are critical; we know wildfires will continue to impact Californians. Preparing for the worst and knowing your next steps could make a terrible situation a bit more straightforward.



Eaton Fire recovery, CAL FIRE.

Coming Home

Once local authorities have declared it safe to return to your home, you'll have a lot ahead of you. In addition to dealing with the emotional and physical scale of loss, you will need to document everything and contact your insurance company, mortgage lender, and local emergency services to determine what guidance and resource are available. It is critical to take photos of everything as soon as you are back on site, and to begin the task of creating an inventory of items that have been lost.

INSURANCE

If you are insured, file a claim as soon as possible and keep track of all your expenses; you may qualify for "loss of use" coverage if you provide receipts for clothing, food, lodging, and more.

Cleaning Up

Burned home debris and ash require specialized cleanup services due to toxic substances and chemicals. The **U.S. EPA**

or, if tasked by Cal OES, the **Department of Toxic Substances Control** will clean up the toxic and hazardous material. Once complete, **CalRecycle** may collaborate with local, state, and federal partners (such as the **US Army Corps of Engineers**), to remove the remaining ash and debris. These efforts will likely require you to sign a Right of Entry permit. If able, homeowners may also hire a private contractor or conduct cleanup efforts themselves, while adhering to safety and environmental regulations.

Landowners with ample burned forestland may qualify for assistance from local organizations such as Resource Conservation Districts, county governments, or water agencies that have secured funding for hazardous dead tree removal. These efforts often require the expertise of a California Registered Professional Forester (RPF) to assess sites, ensure regulatory compliance, and oversee safe, ecologically sound operations. Local Emergency Forest Restoration Teams (EFRT, covered in the **Summer 2023** issue of the Forestland Steward Newsletter), frequently partner with RPFs to help private non-industrial forest owners restore their land post-wildfire. Additionally, **CAL FIRE's CFIP** provides significant cost-share funding for post-fire restoration on parcels of 20 acres or more.

Finding Financial Assistance

If the wildfire has been officially declared a disaster by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), you'll be able to find resources specifically tailored to your region, as well as **apply for financial assistance**, through their website. FEMA funds and administers **services** such as rental payments, home repairs, personal property replacement, medical needs, unemployment payments, and more.

Every county in California offers provisions for emergency property tax relief, allowing landowners to have their property's value reassessed and delay payment of property taxes. Your local tax assessor will help you through this process. They can be found easily using the **California State Board of Equalization listing**.

In Los Angeles specifically, eligibility has been



ReBuild LA, Habitat For Humanity.
Captured by James Buck.

expanded for the **CalAssist Mortgage Fund**, which is administered by the California Housing Finance Agency. This program offers up to \$20,000 per household in mortgage support for up to three payments, which never has to be repaid.

Rebuilding

When and if you are prepared to build again, you will need to apply for a permit through your local government. Regulations will vary depending on your community, but you will at least need detailed building plans, supporting documents, and the support of a licensed contractor unless you are an owner-builder. Organizations such as the **California Community Foundation** may offer financial assistance to those looking to rebuild.

Following the Eaton Fire, Altadena residents created a **network** of architects and designers that provides resources to survivors, including permitting advice, contractor recommendations, and design services. While not every community may be lucky enough to have this kind of resource, community resilience can flourish in the face of loss and hardship, and resources will be available to help you move forward.

Want to Know More?

As of 2026, the Forestland Steward Newsletter has been publishing resources for private nonindustrial forestland owners for 30 years. In that time, we've covered topics from watershed health to defensible space, and nearly everything in between. If you're looking for information on a particular topic, you can find it in our new matrix at placerrcd.org/forestland-steward.

GIVE US FEEDBACK!

To ensure we continue to offer information that is useful and relevant to you, we would love it if you **filled out our survey**, also available at placerrcd.org/forestland-steward. Your feedback will allow us to tailor future issues to your concerns, and help share forestland management information for years to come.

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