



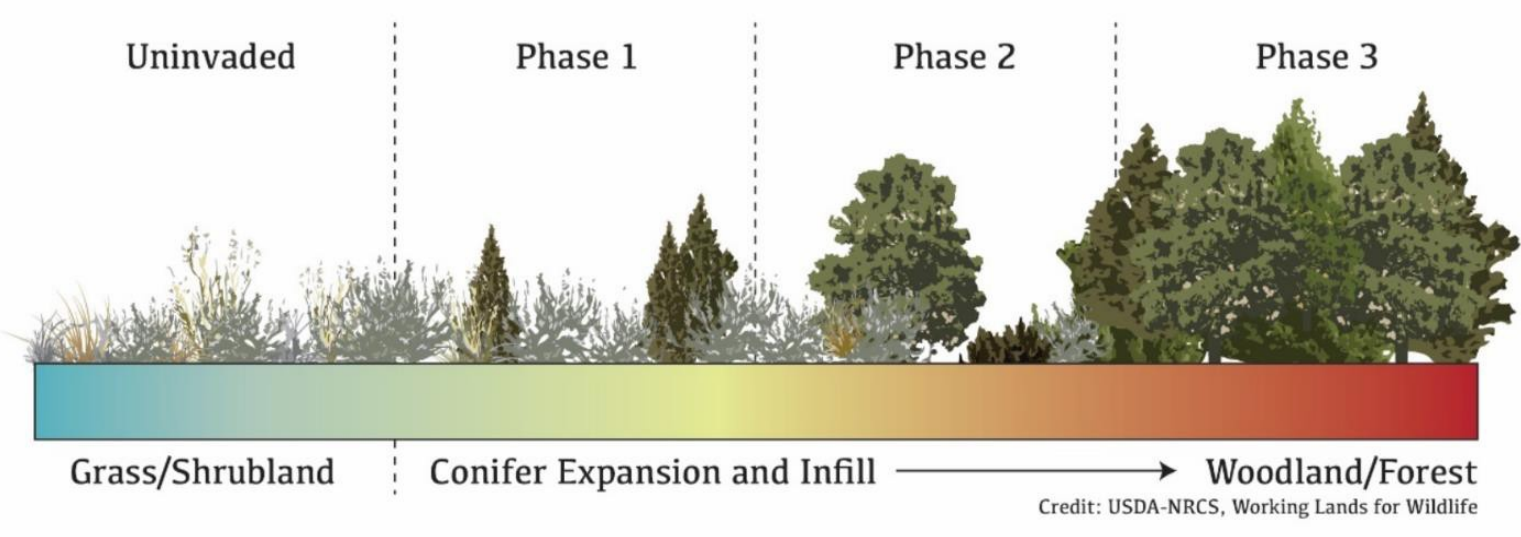
Conifer Expansion in Southwest Montana

Southwest Montana is a grand mosaic of diverse ecosystems. Expanding conifer trees are threatening this diversity and reducing water resources in the region. Since 2017, habitat restoration has occurred on over 9,000 acres to push back expanding conifers. Projects have restored everything from aspen to our sagebrush grasslands, across both public and private lands. Work will continue this summer to restore 4,000 more acres.

Virginia City, 1950



Virginia City, 2017



Hunting and Fishing

Expanding Douglas fir and juniper trees outcompete other native plants reducing forage for wildlife while increasing wildlife use of private crop lands. Conifers also diminish groundwater and streamflow's as they compete for limited water resources. Reduced water in SW Montana leads to degraded aquatic and riparian habitat for native fish and wildlife species.



Wildfires

Wildfires burning in dense conifer stands burn at higher intensity inhibiting post-wildfire reestablishment of native vegetation. Historic fire suppression has allowed for conifer expansion and infill, leaving our diverse habitats less resilient to both wildfire and drought; and more vulnerable to higher severity wildfires that can have devastating consequences.

Ranching

Livestock ranching income may be cut by as much as one third, as sagebrush habitats are converted to juniper woodlands (McLain, 2012). Removing conifers preserves productivity of our sagebrush grasslands and secures future economic viability for ranchers. Prosperous family ranches make for prosperous communities while preserving open spaces and connectivity of critical wildlife habitat.



While conifers are being removed you may see

- Heavy equipment
- Chainsaw crews
- Slash piles
- Smoke from prescribed fires