

Written Public Testimony of the
National Association of State Foresters

Submitted to the
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

March 13, 2008

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony to the Committee regarding our appropriations recommendations for fiscal year 2009. Our priorities center entirely on the US Forest Service agency appropriation for State and Private Forestry (S&PF) Programs, with a particular emphasis on State Fire Assistance (SFA), Cooperative Forest Health, Forest Stewardship, and Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF). The total NASF recommendation for those four programs for FY2009 is \$292 million, representing a reasonable increase over FY2008 enacted levels of \$192 million for the same programs.

State and private forests make up more than two thirds of our nation's forests, and provide a host of important benefits, including clean air and water, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, carbon sequestration and storage, and a variety of forest products. Managed forests mean jobs and vibrant communities, and S&PF programs are aimed at ensuring state and private forests continue to play a role in the environmental and economic health of our nation. However, the FY09 Administration request for NASF priority line-items is a paltry \$85 million. At this minuscule level of funding, many S&PF programs would essentially be put out of business, leaving the forest resource in grave danger. NASF encourages Congress to once again restore reasonable levels of funding to these important programs.

State Fire Assistance (SFA)

SFA funds are a critical tool in the fight against catastrophic wildfire. SFA funds have been used to train 200,000 wildland firefighters since 2002, strengthening the first line of defense against wildfire regardless of agency jurisdiction or land ownership. State Fire Assistance monies are also the only federal dollars committed to hazardous fuel reduction treatments on private lands, treatments that are often prioritized by Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). These plans, which also derive funding from State Fire Assistance, allow communities to prioritize fire-related activities in a way that considers local concerns and permits local leadership, all the while ensuring high levels of community buy-in. While 4,762 communities have created plans with SFA money, that is only a fraction of the communities that could benefit from having such a plan. State Fire Assistance dollars also pay for the FireWise program, which provides much-needed education and outreach about the dangers of wildfire.

State Fire Assistance is the premier forest protection program in State and Private Forestry. The program is aimed at proactive planning and preparedness to ensure that

private forests across the country can count on a level of protection that would otherwise be impossible, and the program deliverables will also help drive down the cost of fire suppression over time. State Fire Assistance is crucial to healthy forests, but also to safe communities. NASF recommends \$50 million for Cooperative Fire Protection SFA and \$95 million for Wildland Fire Management SFA.

Cooperative Forest Health

The Cooperative Forest Health program is aimed at addressing forest health issues on non-federal forestland, with a specific focus on prevention, detection, and suppression of damaging insects, disease and invasive plants. Every year, the American public loses billions of dollars in benefits from trees and forests to damage by invasive pests. Cooperative Forest Health dollars support the development and application of new technologies that mitigate these forest health concerns that know no land ownership boundaries.

With many invasive pests already making their dangerous presence known, like Emerald Ash Borer and Sudden Oak Death, and even more threats looming on the horizon, the time to fully fund the Cooperative Forest Health program is now. These pests leave a trail of dead and dying trees in their wake, and provide substantial fuel for catastrophic wildfire. NASF recommends funding Cooperative Forest Health at the \$53 million level in State and Private Forestry and at the \$13 million level in Wildland Fire Management.

Urban and Community Forestry

Connecting children to nature is one of Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell's top goals, and the best way to do that is to foster the natural areas nearest to them. Urban forests serve the needs of diverse communities that would otherwise not be exposed to nature, and would bring awareness to those groups underrepresented in natural resource fields. Urban forests are associated with a number of health and social benefits that provide an overall improved quality of life for community residents. Trees improve city air quality, and serve to reduce the carbon footprint to our human population centers. Urban Forests also improve real-estate markets and community livability.

The urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program assists local efforts that help urban areas and rural communities manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. The assistance is conveyed largely through State forestry agencies working with local community groups. U&CF relies greatly on interagency cooperation, communication, and partnership. These partnerships maximize both public and private resources and are estimated to return nearly \$10 in non-federal contributions for every federal \$1 invested in U&CF.

Eighty percent of Americans live in urban centers and in the past three years, nearly eight thousand communities have participated in stewardship of our urban natural resources. Neighborhood trees and forest may seem like a small sampling of nature in the concrete jungle, but when they are lost the whole community loses. The National Association of

State Foresters recognizes the desperate need for human-environment interactions and proposes an increase in Urban and Community forestry funding to \$36 million.

Forest Stewardship Program

The Forest Stewardship Program is the primary program for promoting sustainable forest management on family forestlands. The program helps keep forestland forested – one of the most significant ways of combating global warming. Keeping forests forested provides a full array of public benefits and ecosystem services from clean air and water, recreation, and wildlife habitat.

A recent study predicts that if current forest trends continue, forests in the United States will decrease by 23 million acres by the year 2050. This will be a devastating loss to our nation's forests and the ecosystems they support. In order to combat deforestation and land use change private landowners need programs like Forest Stewardship to assist them in managing their land properly. These programs deliver expert advice and financial assistance to landowners and communities for the protection, management, and sustainability of their forests. Many Forest Stewardship Program projects work in company with nurseries providing technical advice to grow seedlings that will become our nation's forests. Better forest management means healthier forests that are less susceptible to insects, disease and wildfire, and in most cases healthier forests sequester more carbon - combating global warming.

Forest stewardship is also vital to supplying locally produced energy feedstock that reduce our reliance on foreign oil and create jobs. Since its inception in 1991, the Forest Stewardship Program has completed over 240,000 Stewardship Plans covering over 30 million acres. NASF wants to increase the number of sustainably managed acres and recommends increasing Forest Stewardship Program funding to \$45 million in the FY 2009 budget. If appropriate funding levels are not restored, forestland owners across the United States will seek alternative income from their lands – many often being sold for development, thus altering the land forever.

Fire Suppression

Of course, it has become increasingly difficult to provide these much-needed programs with appropriate funding levels as fire suppression costs continue to grow. In fiscal year 2009, 48 percent of the US Forest Service budget will be spent suppressing wildland fire, an expenditure that is necessary and unavoidable, but which also inhibits the agency's ability to deliver on other priorities, including State and Private Forestry. NASF has been a leader in working with Congress to resolve this issue, trying to find a solution that funds emergency wildfire costs, but not at the expense of State and Private Forestry programs.

The NASF solution, which has been incorporated to some degree by legislation currently before the US House of Representatives, espouses a two-fold solution for dealing with this serious problem. The first part of the solution is the creation of a partitioned fund

expressly designed to cover the costs of emergency wildfire suppression. This fund should have clearly outlined definitions for what precisely constitutes an 'emergency fire' and should boast strong incentives for cost containment and robust accountability measures. The second part of the solution is the reformulation of the Forest Service budget that would set realistic funding levels (reflective of programmatic needs) for non-emergency wildfire programs, like normal fire suppression activity, as well as State and Private Forestry programs. This dual-part solution will ensure that both emergency fire suppression and other mission-centric Forest Service priorities receive adequate funding.

NASF has circulated this proposal widely among members of Congress and partner stakeholders. We have testified on this very topic before the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies in the past, and we are pleased that some progress has recently been made to remedy this persistent problem. We look forward to working with leaders in Congress to improve the forest resource nationwide, and to further all of our collective priorities.