

**Written Public Testimony of Steve Koehn, President  
National Association of State Foresters**

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

**March 19, 2010**

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 2011. Our priorities for Interior appropriations center on the USDA Forest Service agency appropriation for State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs, with a particular emphasis on Forest Inventory and Analysis, State Fire Assistance, Cooperative Forest Health, Forest Stewardship and Urban and Community Forestry. The total NASF recommendation for S&PF is \$355 million, representing a 15% increase over the FY2010 enacted levels.

As stewards of the more than two-thirds of America's forests in state and private ownership, state foresters deliver outreach, technical and financial assistance as well as wildfire protection through the S&PF mission area of the Forest Service. S&PF programs leverage the capacity of state agencies to provide vital assistance to forest landowners, tribes and communities to restore, manage, and protect their forests and green spaces.

Even in a tight budget climate, state foresters believe it is critically important to make solid investments in S&PF programs that help realize the potential of America's forests in addressing national priorities related to climate change mitigation, renewable energy production and job creation. Funding reductions to S&PF programs will ultimately lead to reduced ability to conserve and manage forests, to enhance public benefits from forests, and to protect forests from catastrophic wildfires, insects and diseases and development—all of which are national priorities for private forest conservation identified in the 2008 Farm Bill.

**FOREST INVENTORY AND INFORMATION**

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, managed by USDA Forest Service Research, is the nation's only comprehensive forest inventory system for assessing the health and sustainability of the nation's forests across all ownerships. FIA collects essential data on everything from forest species composition, to forest growth rates, to forest health data. It provides unbiased information that serves as the basis for monitoring trends in wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, predicting spread of invasive species and for solving many other resource questions.

The Agricultural Research, Extension, and Education Reform Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-85) mandated the USDA Forest Service to partner with the states and non-governmental interests to implement a nationally consistent, annual inventory program in all states, ensuring timely availability of data and developing state-level reports every five years. Unfortunately, states such as Wyoming, Nevada, Hawaii and interior Alaska have not been inventoried under the program, and many other states lack timely updates. A solid inventory is essential to all our forest priorities whether mitigating climate change, providing woody biomass for renewable energy production or determining the timber supply available to support local mills and local jobs.

NASF recommends the FIA program be funded at a minimum of \$76 million for FY2011, with \$71 million through Forest and Rangeland Research and \$5 million through State & Private Forestry. Funding at this level will help inventory every state on an annual basis, develop new carbon accounting protocols and improve the ability of the program to estimate sustainable supplies of biomass for renewable energy production.

### **WILDFIRE PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE**

More people in fire-prone landscapes, larger and more frequent wildfires, climate change, and unhealthy landscapes have created a wildland fire situation that has become increasingly expensive and complex. The State Fire Assistance (SFA) program is the fundamental federal assistance mechanism that states and local fire departments use to develop preparedness and response capabilities for wildland fire management on non-federal lands. The program has helped over 11,000 communities prioritize their preparedness and mitigation efforts through the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs); yet, the threat of wildfire to lives and property remains in more than 69,000 communities at risk.<sup>1</sup> NASF recommends \$45 million for Cooperative Fire Protection SFA and \$70 million for Wildland Fire Management SFA to address the mitigation and preparedness backlog in communities at risk from wildfire.

In 2009, the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act (FLAME Act) established two funds—one for the Forest Service and another for the Department of the Interior (DOI)—to reduce the need for the agencies to transfer funds to wildfire suppression from other agency programs, which have historically led to considerable disruptions to important program functions. Congress included specific instructions that FLAME should be funded with improved estimates and not at the expense of other agency programs. For FY2010, the Forest Service received \$413 million and DOI received \$75 million for their respective FLAME funds.

The President's budget proposal for FY2011 includes not only the FLAME Funds but also a Wildland Fire Contingency Reserve for each agency. These Reserves are accessible after the "regular" suppression dollars and the FLAME Funds have been exhausted and require a Presidential declaration to be accessed. These Contingency Reserves are duplicative of the FLAME funds and have the potential to limit the success of the solution Congress enacted last fall. The FLAME Act already lays out the partitioning of the wildland fire suppression account and how they should be funded and managed.

We request that appropriators reaffirm their support for the FLAME Act by funding only the FLAME account at appropriate levels. Additionally, we recommend the appropriators continue providing direction to the agencies to develop FLAME and "regular" suppression funding estimates that are based on an accurate, predictive model, and **not** on the outdated, traditional rolling 10-year average currently used by the Forest Service. Further, we share your commitment to the Comprehensive Wildfire Management Strategy called for in the FLAME Act and look forward to the intergovernmental collaboration with our federal partners to deliver the report this October.

---

<sup>1</sup> NASF FY2009 *Communities at Risk Report*, February 2010

### **FOREST HEALTH THREATS**

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program provides funding assistance to maintain healthy, productive forest ecosystems on non-federal forestland. Program activities include prevention, detection, and suppression of damaging insects, diseases, and plants. We greatly appreciate the subcommittee's increased FY2010 investment in the program, which helped provide resources to respond to the emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid, gypsy moth and other forest pests and diseases. Work remains, however, as the country loses billions of dollars in forest and tree benefits each year to these and other new forest health threats such as the gold-spotted oak borer, thousand canker disease, laurel wilt disease, and sudden oak death.

The Forest Health Management Program needs adequate funding to expand its Early Detection project, which is responsible for detecting more than a dozen introduced insects including the sirex woodwasp and Mediterranean pine beetle, both of which threaten the economically important pine forests of the Southeast. The detection program covers all states on a three-year rotation and is in urgent need of resources to develop and deploy methodologies to detect highly damaging wood-boring beetles. As the majority of the nation's forests are in private ownership, a landowner assistance program for early detection and rapid response for these pine pests (as well as others) should be considered. Now is not the time to reduce funding for this vitally important program designed to target and respond to damaging pests and disease. 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.

### **LANDOWNER ASSISTANCE**

The Forest Stewardship Program is the most extensive family forest-owner assistance program in the country. Planning assistance is delivered in cooperation with state forestry agencies primarily through the development of Forest Stewardship Plans. The program provides information to private landowners to help them manage their land for wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber production, and many other purposes. The FSP also plays a fundamental role in keeping forests as forests so they can continue to provide clean air and water, climate change mitigation benefits and biomass for renewable energy production while maintaining jobs and supporting diverse forest products markets in rural communities.

The technical assistance provided through the FSP is also critical to the success of other popular USDA cost-share and state tax abatement programs. For instance, the FSP enables landowners to participate in the Forest Legacy Program, Environmental Quality Incentives Program, and the Biomass Crop Assistance Program. The FSP also increasingly serves as the gateway to participating in forest certification programs and accessing renewable energy and carbon markets. Unfortunately, funding levels over the recent fiscal years have been out-of-step with the increasing demand for technical assistance provided through the program. NASF recommends appropriating \$45 million to the Forest Stewardship Program for FY2011.

### **TREES AND FORESTS WHERE AMERICANS LIVE**

Urban forests include the tree canopy cover above every neighborhood, town and city in America. They provide environmental, social and economic benefits to more than 80% of the nation's population. Urban forests provide energy savings, improve air quality, neighborhood stability, aesthetic values, reduce noise and provide a better quality of life for communities across the country. Since its expansion under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1990,

the Forest Service's Urban & Community Forestry (U&CF) program has provided technical and financial assistance to promote the stewardship of critically important green infrastructure.

The program is delivered in close partnership with State Foresters and leverages existing local efforts that have helped thousands of communities and towns manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. In addition, the U&CF program provides critical assistance to help communities manage risk, respond to storms and disturbances, and contain threats from invasive pests. The program also conducts pioneering research on the effects urban forests have on reducing greenhouse gasses, creating energy savings and mitigating the impacts of climate change. NASF supports an appropriation of \$40 million in FY2011 to help deliver the baseline technical, financial, research and educational services which help communities in every state assess, manage, and optimize the benefits of trees in urbanized landscapes.

### **ALL LANDS, ALL HANDS**

In a speech in fall of 2009, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack delivered his vision for America's forests, recognizing that the spectrum of US Forest Service responsibilities extends well beyond national forests and includes stewardship of state and private lands as well. NASF supports the efforts of Secretary Vilsack and Forest Service Chief Tidwell to advance a **shared** vision for the nation's forests based on an "all-lands" approach to conservation.

***Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies.*** The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) set into motion landmark changes in the way trees and forests will be managed, conserved, used and enjoyed today and for future generations. At its foundation is the requirement for each state to coordinate with local partners, stakeholders and other federal and state natural resource agencies to complete a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy. The Assessments provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends in the state and delineate priority rural and urban forest landscape areas. The Resource Strategies provide long-term plans for investing state, federal, and other resources to where they can most effectively stimulate or leverage desired action and engage multiple partners. This sets the stage for integrated decision-making regarding federal investments that are based on high priority needs and opportunities identified by each state and not necessarily programmatic mandates (as is currently the case). Per the direction in the 2008 Farm Bill, state and territorial forestry agencies will complete and begin implementing individual Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies in June 2010.

***Integrated Resource Restoration Funding.*** The FY2011 Forest Service Budget Justification includes a positive first step toward implementing the administration's all-lands approach. Funding for a new Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item for the National Forest System will allow for greater local decision-making in addressing priority issues and landscapes on National Forest System lands, and provides support for integrating those identified in State Assessments. Budget flexibility and less "stovepipe funding" can be very effective in restoration efforts that cross boundaries and program areas. Flexibility should be accompanied by accountability of each national forest system unit in accomplishing the objectives set forth in its land and resource management plan. Performance measures should be established that document accomplishment of management goals related to wildlife, timber and watershed restoration.