

**Written Public Testimony of Leah MacSwords, President  
National Association of State Foresters**

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

**April 23, 2009**

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 2010. 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 State Fire Assistance (SFA), Cooperative Forest Health, Forest Stewardship, Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) and Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA). The total NASF recommendation for S&PF is \$335 million, representing a 26% increase over the 2009 enacted levels. NASF also recommends a modest investment of \$10 million in the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill.

The nation's forests are a strategic national resource that provides a host of important benefits to the American people: clean and abundant water, clean air, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, carbon sequestration and storage, renewable energy, and forest products. State forestry agencies manage and protect state and private forests across the US – which encompass two-thirds of the nation's forests – as well as support our federal partners in their efforts.

Our forests today face significant challenges to ecosystem health, regardless of ownership: tree mortality is on the rise due to disease and invasive pests; wildfire continues to increase in size and intensity; ecosystems struggle to adapt to climate change disturbances; and forests are being permanently converted to non-forest uses at a rate of one million acres per year. State and Private Forestry programs multiply the public benefits of federal funding by leveraging in-kind contributions through cost-share programs and matching funds from states. As directed by Congress in the 2008 Farm Bill, State Foresters are preparing Statewide Assessments and Strategies for Forest Resources to strategically invest federal funding for forestry programs to meet federal objectives in state priority areas and ensure that state and private forests continue to play a role in the environmental and economic health of our nation.

**STATE FIRE ASSISTANCE (SFA)**

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. Effective wildland fire management requires partnerships between agencies and communities. The State Fire Assistance 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. Improved response efficiency provided through State Fire Assistance funding is critical to reducing suppression costs, which have continued to skyrocket, reaching over \$1 billion in six of the last eight years.

SFA is an essential funding source for the development of Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). CWPPs are powerful tools that enable communities to prioritize their preparedness and mitigation efforts across boundaries, on federal, state, and private lands. As of 2008, SFA funding helped approximately 4,700 communities prioritize their preparedness and mitigation efforts on nearby private and federal lands. To date, it is estimated that CWPPs have enabled approximately 11,000 communities reduce the risk through fuel mitigation and Firewise activities, yet the threat of wildfire to lives and property remains in more than 64,000 communities. At current funding levels, each of these communities would receive only about \$1,300 to build capacity and develop preparedness plans.

SFA is the only federal program that currently provides funding for fuel reduction work on non-federal lands, regardless of their proximity to federal lands. Funding hazardous fuels reduction on federal lands is critical, but an exclusive focus on federal lands is an incomplete solution and will ultimately undermine success. Increased SFA funding for fuel reduction work on state and private lands is essential for a landscape-scale approach to reduce hazardous fuels.

NASF recommends \$45 million for Cooperative Fire Protections SFA and \$70 million for Wildland Fire Management SFA to address the mitigation and preparedness backlog in communities at risk of being burned by catastrophic wildfire.

#### **COOPERATIVE FOREST HEALTH MANAGEMENT**

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program provides funding assistance to maintain healthy, productive forest ecosystems on non-federal forestland. Forest Health Management activities include prevention, detection, and suppression of damaging insects, diseases, and plants. Well established forest pests cause the American public to lose billions of dollars in forest and tree benefits each year. This program funds the highest priority prevention and suppression needs of various pests and diseases, including southern pine beetle, hemlock woolly adelgid, oak wilt, gypsy moth and other emerging threats.

For example, the Forest Health Management program provides expertise in detecting and curtailing the spread of the emerald ash borer, which has been detected in nine states. The emerald ash borer threatens to destroy ash trees in our nation's forests, communities, boulevards and backyards similar to the way in which Dutch Elm Disease killed millions of elm trees across North America in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Another devastating pest, the Asian longhorned beetle, has destroyed northern hardwood forests surrounding Worcester, Massachusetts, and now endangers vulnerable hardwood timber, maple syrup and tourism industries from Maine to Minnesota—many of the same states currently responding to the Emerald Ash Borer. Now is not the time to reduce funding for this vitally important program designed to target and respond to damaging pests and disease.

The Forest Health Management Program needs adequate funding to expand its Early Detection project, which ultimately reduces future response expenditures for these pests. This program has been responsible for detecting more than a dozen introduced insects, including the Sirex woodwasp and Mediterranean pine beetle, which threaten the economically important pine forests of the Southeast, as well as other recent arrivals such as the gold-spotted oak borer, which has infested as much as 70% of the oak trees in southern California. 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.

### **FOREST STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM (FSP)**

The Forest Stewardship program provides families and individuals with the technical information necessary to encourage long-term stewardship and sustainability of their forests. Planning assistance is delivered through state forestry agencies primarily through the development of Forest Stewardship Plans which outline strategies and timelines to help accomplish landowner goals for their forest land.

National priorities for climate mitigation and adaptation bring renewed attention to the importance of investing in the Forest Stewardship program and its role in helping millions of family forest owners prepare their forests for adverse impacts, conditions, and opportunities created by climate change. Technical assistance provided through FSP will ensure landowners have the information needed to implement adaptation practices which provide habitat and migration corridors, improve biodiversity and the ability of forests to sequester and store carbon. Per the 2008 Farm Bill, Forest Stewardship Plans also provide landowners with greater access to other USDA conservation programs designed to keep the nation's private forest lands productive and healthy at a time when climate change adds new complexities to their management.

A well-managed forest provides a full-array of benefits (e.g., clean air and water, wildlife habitat and climate change mitigation) at little cost to the American public. The Forest Stewardship program provides the guidance necessary to ensure our nation's non-federal forests can continue to provide for the public good while leaving them less susceptible to forest health threats including fire, insects and disease, and conversion to non-forest uses. NASF recommends increasing Forest Stewardship Program funding to \$45 million for FY 2010.

### **URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY (U&CF)**

Urban and community forests are essential green infrastructure to 226 million taxpayers. The Forest Service's U&CF program provides technical and financial assistance to promote the stewardship of urban and community trees and forest resources. The program leverages existing local efforts that help cities and towns manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. Community forestry activities help to create jobs, contribute to energy security, and promote healthier human environments.

Inventory and data collection of urban forests in all 50 states would support new jobs and provide a national picture of the condition, structure, function, and value of the urban forest resource. The U&CF program helps provide this baseline data which are especially important to the 800+ cities that are expanding sustainability initiatives as part of their commitment to combat climate change. NASF strongly urges Congress to provide expanded or project-specific funding for Urban and Community Forestry grants that accomplish high priority adaptation and mitigation projects as identified in the State-wide Assessment and Strategies for Forest Resources.

Shade provided by strategically placed urban tree cover helps conserve energy and can reduce the need for additional power plants. Urban forests also generate a significant amount of wood

waste which can be converted into renewable energy or alternative fuels. The U&CF program provides information and assistance to communities (through State Foresters) that encourage cooperative efforts to plant, protect, maintain and utilize wood from trees in urban areas.

Because U&CF efforts emphasize the vital connection between human and natural environments, they provide numerous social and aesthetic benefits and help address social-environmental justice in populated areas. City forestry programs engage residents in hands-on action to promote neighborhood revitalization and stabilization. NASF proposes an increase in Urban and Community forestry funding to \$36 million.

### **FOREST INVENTORY AND ANALYSIS (FIA)**

The Forest Inventory and Analysis 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. The 1998 Farm Bill 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.

FIA collects data on everything from forest species composition, to forest growth rates, to forest health data. It provides unbiased information which 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. It is particularly important tool used to inform the State Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies required by the 2008 Farm Bill.

As we tackle our nation's need for energy independence and climate mitigation, States rely on the FIA data more than ever to provide information about biomass and carbon sequestration in forests. For instance, FIA data currently plays an important role in carbon accounting systems found in existing regional voluntary carbon trading programs. FIA estimates also help renewable energy investors identify landscapes where a sustainable supply of woody-biomass is available before siting wood-based bioenergy facilities. With the growth of renewable energy and carbon markets, FIA will serve a valuable role in determining how our forest resources can contribute to an improved environment while fostering economic development. NASF recommends the FIA program be funded at a minimum of \$73 million for FY 2010, with \$68 million through Forest and Rangeland Research and \$5 million through State & Private Forestry

### **COMMUNITY FOREST AND OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION**

The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation program, authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill, provides matching funds to help local government entities, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations to create new community forests. It will also offer technical assistance to develop and implement management plans for each new community forest. While not included in the FY 2010 President's Budget for the Forest Service, NASF and our partners are working with the agency to establish regulations and program guidelines. The modest recommendation of \$10 million will establish the program on solid footing and allow the agency to pilot test the program.