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Sarah McCreary, Communications Director
smccreary@stateforesters.org; 202-624-5417

State Forestry Agencies Identify Priority Lands and Issues Across America

First-ever suite of Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies completed by 59 forestry agencies

Washington DC, June 21, 2010 – The fifty-nine members of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) have completed the first-ever comprehensive suite of Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies as part of a national effort towards protecting and sustaining healthy forests. The assessments provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends in the state and identify priority rural and urban forest areas and issues. The strategies provide long-term plans for addressing needs identified in the assessments through state agency initiatives, partner engagement and federal investments. Individually and as a whole, the Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies represent an invaluable asset to the nation for forest conservation decision making.

The assessments and strategies were authorized by the forestry title of the 2008 Farm Bill, which set into motion landmark changes in the way trees and forests on all lands will be managed, conserved, used and enjoyed today and for future generations. When states determine their most critical areas and issues, it sets the stage for local, state and federal investments that target the highest priority conservation needs. It also contributes to a framework for strategic national forestry goals including slowing forest loss, mitigating the effects of climate change, protecting communities from wildfire, creating jobs and supporting markets for forest products.

State forestry agencies developed their assessments and strategies with a degree of flexibility in terms of format and approach, but all were guided by three national priorities: 1) Conserve working forest landscapes, 2) Protect forests from threats, and 3) Enhance public benefits from trees and forests. Using public input, local expertise and the best available data on forest conditions, the documents also incorporate existing forest management plans—including state wildlife action plans and community wildfire protection plans—to identify existing partnerships and new opportunities for cooperation between government, private landowners and the conservation community. The result will be healthier and more resilient landscapes, better and more fire-adapted communities, improved habitat, air and water quality, and a host of other public benefits that come from actively and sustainably managed forests.

With all assessments and strategies completed and delivered to the Forest Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture this month, every U.S. state and territory will have a meaningful account of and targeted plan for America's trees and forests. Long term, the release of the documents marks the beginning of an ongoing and dynamic process of resource management and planning that will be revisited annually and updated every five years. Over the coming months, analysis of the content of the assessments and strategies from both regional and national perspectives will illuminate the challenges and opportunities facing America's forests.

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of U.S. state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia. NASF seeks to advance sustainable forestry, conservation, and protection of forest lands and their associated resources. <http://www.stateforesters.org>