



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 540, Washington, DC 20001

MEDIA CONTACT:

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

State Foresters Urge Comprehensive Solution as House passes FLAME Act

Washington D.C., July 9, 2008 – The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) was encouraged by the dialogue on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives today over the need to address the ever-increasing impact of emergency fire suppression costs on the USDA Forest Service and the Department of Interior's (DOI) constrained budgets. Unfortunately, the Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement (FLAME) Act, as passed by the House, falls short of achieving a comprehensive fix for the federal funding challenges of wildfire suppression.

The FLAME Act sets up a partitioned account for the Forest Service and DOI to use for fighting large-scale, emergency wildland fire events and includes new reporting requirements for the agencies. This partitioned account will not solve the problem, however, if its funding source comes from the agencies' constrained budgets. The bill passed today includes language that would continue to base the suppression budget amount on the 10-year average of all events, emergency and normal—a practice which forces the Forest Service to pull funds from fire prevention and preparedness, hazardous fuels mitigation, and other forest management programs that are the long-term solutions to the nation's ever increasing wildland fire problems. NASF believes that funding for large-scale, emergency wildland fire events must come from another source and be designated as supplemental/emergency monies, thus allowing for reinvestment in the programs that fulfill the Forest Service's mission.

The sponsors of the FLAME Act have championed the need for a comprehensive legislative fix and we commend their efforts to bring this issue to the attention of their congressional peers. Their leadership has resulted in broad bipartisan support recognizing that extraordinary emergency fires should be treated the same way as other natural disasters—and not come at the expense of all other USFS priorities and programs.

NASF looks forward to working with the Senate to address the shortcomings of this bill and ensure that a fiscally sound and comprehensive solution is adopted before the end of the 2008 fire season. With insightful, decisive congressional action, this problem can be solved.

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of state and territorial agencies and the District of Columbia. Through public-private partnership, NASF seeks to advance sustainable forestry, conservation, and protection of forestlands and their associated resources.

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