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New Guide Empowers Communities to Prepare for Wildfires

Collaborative group of agencies and non-governmental organizations develop resource guide

September 17, 2008, Washington, DC: Communities where homes are intermixed with forests and wildlands have a new fire-fighting tool that will help protect property in the event of a wildfire – the “Community Guide to Preparing and Implementing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan.” Community Wildfire Protection Plans have proven to be one of the most successful tools for addressing wildfire risks, but more than 90 percent of the 44,000 at-risk communities do not have a CWPP in place.

Establishing and maintaining a CWPP depends on widespread collaboration among landowners, emergency response agencies, and federal, state and local officials. The new Community Guide offers innovative strategies, case studies and other resources to improve coordination and communication among stakeholders as they develop, implement, and monitor the success of a CWPP.

The Community Guide was developed under the leadership of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council, which provides intergovernmental oversight of the implementation of federal fire management policy. As a member of WFLC, the National Association of State Foresters joined a multi-sector group of local, state, federal government and non-governmental partners to pool expertise and lessons-learned so more communities across the U.S. can reduce their risk to wildfire.

“In a fire environment where federal suppression costs exceed \$1 billion annually, CWPPs are powerful because they help localities take responsibility for their own wildfire protection,” said Jeff Jahnke, Colorado State Forester and chair of the NASF Forest Fire Protection Committee. “The more proactive a community is, the more they can reduce their risk from wildfire and restore healthier, more resilient conditions in their surrounding forests.”

Participating in the collaborative along with NASF were the Communities Committee, The Forest Guild, International Association of Fire Chiefs, National Association of Counties, The Nature Conservancy, Resource Innovations at the University of Oregon, Society of American Foresters, Sustainable Northwest, and the Western Governors’ Association.

“The high level of participation by non-governmental partners brought an important depth of perspective to the Guide and demonstrated their strong commitment to reducing the risk and impact of wildfire to communities,” said Ann Walker, NASF’s group leader for the project and Forest Health Program Director for the Western Governors’ Association.

The National Fire Plan (2000) and the Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA 2003) established the protection of communities from wildfire as a national priority and set up the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, National Fire Plan Implementation Plan as a framework for communities, interest groups, and land management agencies to work together in the interest of healthy forests and safe communities. The Community Guide serves as a supplement to the previous handbook “Preparing a Community Wildfire

Protection Plan” (2004), which outlines the minimum requirements for a CWPP as defined in the HFRA. The new Community Guide also achieves an important milestone – its completion satisfies three requirements of the 10-Year Implementation Plan and sets the stage for a fourth.

The Community Guide may be downloaded online at www.forestsandrangelands.gov/communities/ and www.stateforesters.org/publication-type/reports.

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 forest lands and their associated resources.

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