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FOREST ADAPTATION AND CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION

Climate change threatens the nation's 750 million acres of forests—the same forests which provide clean air and water, carbon sequestration, renewable energy and other ecosystem services at little cost to the public. Changes in precipitation, temperature, fire patterns, increased CO₂ concentrations, pest outbreaks and other factors have the potential to transform forest ecosystems by altering their composition and shifting their distribution. In some cases, forest migration rates may not match the rate at which the climate is changing leaving open the possibility of losing important forest types, forest biodiversity and wildlife habitat.

Planning for these changes will be necessary to help forest ecosystems adapt to climate change, but will be made difficult as forests span across federal, state, local, corporate and family ownerships. Coordinating adaptation activities will need to occur across the National Forest System (i.e. 147 million acres or 20% of the nation's forests) and state and private forest lands (i.e. 495 million acres or 66% of the nation's forests). Particular attention will need to focus on families and individuals who may not have the technical or financial resources necessary to carry out forest adaptation activities, but collectively own 35% of the nation's forests.

The State Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies required by the 2008 Farm Bill will be a key tool in coordinating adaptation activities through an “all lands” approach. The State Assessments identify and respond to forest health threats including those brought about (or made worse by) climate change. In developing the State Assessments, state foresters are coordinating with federal land management agencies, state wildlife agencies and other partners to analyze conditions and trends across forest ownership boundaries in each state. The State Forest Resource Strategies will identify long-term strategies for investing state, federal and other resources in priority forest landscapes and will consider plans often cited as key components of a forest adaptation strategy including:

- Replanting and seeding new forests with drought resistant and other trees selected for adaptation resiliency—particularly in areas of high forest fragmentation;
- Conducting fuels treatments in areas experiencing prolonged drought and at risk of severe wildfire;
- Installing measures that facilitate adaptation of wildlife to climate-induced change in forest habitat including establishment of migration corridors;
- Conducting activities which minimize or prevent insect, disease or invasive infestations that are anticipated to accelerate by changes in climate; and
- Employing measures across contiguous forest landscapes that achieve diverse age classes, species mix, stand structure and other characteristics that assist in forest adaptation.

Improvements to the “Natural Resources Climate Adaptation Act”

NASF greatly appreciates Senator Bingaman's leadership in introducing the “Natural Resources Climate Adaptation Act” (S 1933). We believe the following changes would serve to strengthen S 1933 by:

- Integrating the goals and measures set forth in the State Assessments and Resource Strategies into the state natural resource adaptation planning (Sec. 8) and natural resource adaptation funding (Sec. 9) frameworks;
- Funding forest adaptation efforts through the USDA Forest Service consistent with the current proportion of federal and non-federal forest land ownership on the National Forest System and on state and private forest lands; and
- Providing technical and financial resources to help families and individuals implement forest adaptation activities on their property.

NASF strongly encourages the Senate to amend S 1933 to ensure America's 750 million acres of forests have the resources necessary to adapt to climate change and continue to provide clean air and water, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and numerous other environmental services.

12/04/09