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A Comprehensive Strategy to Address the Role of Firewood in the Introduction and Spread of Invasive Species

A Policy Statement approved by Resolution
by the National Association of State Foresters



Introduction

One of the most serious threats to the forests across the country comes from non-native, invasive insects and diseases. Some of these insects and diseases, such as the chestnut blight and Dutch elm disease, have nearly eliminated major tree species across the majority of their natural range, greatly altering forest ecosystems. States have recently been fighting the spread of the emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, hemlock woolly adelgid, Sirex wood wasp, gypsy moth, and others. It is even likely that new pests and diseases are moving around the country yet undetected.

A major vector for the spread of these insects and diseases is firewood. For example, in Michigan 75 percent of new infestations of emerald ash borer were associated with campgrounds, and 80 percent of outlier infestations were traced to firewood. A major focus on containing the recent outbreak of the Asian longhorned beetle in Worcester, Massachusetts has been on limiting the movement of firewood to points across New England and beyond.

The US Department of Agriculture currently regulates firewood as part of quarantines for individual insect or disease outbreaks, but there is no inclusive or coordinated policy on firewood movement. While some states have begun to address firewood movement on their own through regulation and other mechanisms, a consistent national approach – focused on firewood itself and not just individual pests – is needed to ensure consistency across state lines. In addition, this national model would serve as the necessary foundation for government agency (federal, state, and local) and private sector efforts to control the movement of firewood.

This policy statement describes the appropriate and interdependent functions federal and state regulatory, voluntary, and outreach approaches play in addressing firewood's role in the spread of invasive insects and diseases. In addition, it addresses the various components of a successful framework while ensuring flexibility for states to engage as is most appropriate. It is intended to serve as a long-term guiding document and will not necessarily direct short-term discussions and negotiations.

Components of a Successful Framework

Federal Regulations – The federal government should regulate the interstate movement of firewood not certified as safe from insects and diseases. This federal action serves as the foundation to ensure firewood movement is addressed consistently as it crosses state lines, regardless of individual insects or diseases. Within this framework, states may – where applicable – further restrict the movement of firewood within each state. Some states may seek to regulate firewood crossing into their borders without a federal regulatory framework yet fully in place.

Treatment Standards – Heat treatment is a proven effective method for ensuring firewood is safe to transport across state lines or over long distances within states. State and federal specifications for heat treatment, whether voluntary or regulatory, must be consistent, broadly effective, and feasible. Therefore, a single heat treatment standard should be adopted by the federal government to ensure consistency nationwide. States and industry should look to this standard for any regulatory or voluntary actions they take.

Certification – The federal government, working in close coordination with the states, should establish a national certification program to clearly and consistently identify firewood that has been treated to the federal standard. Firewood bearing a universal federal certification label would be safe for transport across state lines, as well as within states where movement restrictions – either federal quarantines or

state regulations – have been established. States would have the option to adopt the federal treatment standards and certification process to address in-state firewood movement to ensure consistency among states.

Local Sourcing – When certified heat treatment is not a feasible option, the movement of firewood may be limited to an appropriate geographic area within states. While it is important and for state and federal agencies to be consistent in defining the maximum distance uncertified firewood can be moved, this distance may necessarily vary across different areas of the country due to changing environmental factors.

Consistent origin labeling is necessary to ensure actions to limit the movement of non-certified firewood are effective. While consistency among states could be achieved through closely coordinated labeling standards, a single federal standard will likely lead to a more effective program.

Definitions – An important issue for effectively targeting efforts to reduce the role of firewood as a vector is an accurate and workable definition of firewood. Recent advancements of the bioenergy economy make this issue even more important, as wood chips and pellets are more likely to cross state lines. A single, consistent definition of firewood must be developed and used by federal and state agencies that includes all forms of cut and/or split wood suitable for use as fuel. In addition, the definition must be crafted to exclude chips or other small material that has been processed to a size or condition so as not to be a carrier for invasive insects and diseases.

Outreach – No regulatory or voluntary actions to control firewood movement can be successful without strong outreach programs by federal and state governments and leaders in the private sector. Conversely, even the best outreach programs cannot be fully successful without the backdrop of a federal regulatory framework.

Campers, park officials, firewood distributors, corporate sustainability managers, local governments, and others are the most likely audiences for outreach activities, whether broad media campaigns or focused efforts aimed at a narrow group. The increasing visibility of the “Don’t Move Firewood” campaign, sponsored by the Continental Dialogue on Non-Native Forest Insects and Diseases, demonstrates how a coordinated government, industry, and interest group outreach campaign can be effective at reaching a broad audience.

In addition, state and federal agencies must both take an active role in promoting the manufacture and use of certified safe sources of firewood in both inter- and intra-state commerce.

Enforcement – States, where appropriate, may assist in the enforcement of interstate firewood movement regulations. This shared responsibility for enforcement is necessary both due to limited resources and division of authority across state and regional lines. While complete enforcement of the federal regulations is a challenging goal, it should not serve as a rationale for a lack of federal action.

Funding – Adequate funding, particularly for outreach and enforcement, is an issue of concern for many. A comprehensive framework for addressing firewood movement should not become an unfunded mandate for states, nor should it stress resources at the federal level. States should receive additional funding to help support enforcement and outreach efforts. In addition, states should play an active role, where appropriate, in securing additional federal funding to support programs to address firewood movement.

Role of Government Agencies

Federal

- Regulate the interstate movement of firewood not certified as safe from insect pests and diseases.
- Establish a treatment and certification program in coordination with the states to consistently recognize firewood that has been made safe through heat treatment or other acceptable means.
- Provide consistency in terminology, definitions, specifications, treatment standards, certification, and documentation.
- Provide outreach to other federal agencies, state governments, industry, campers, and others.

State

- Where appropriate and supported, regulate firewood movement within respective states using the federal treatment and certification standards to ensure consistency.
- Where appropriate and supported, establish local-sourcing guidelines that incorporate consistent origin labeling standards.
- Provide outreach to other state agencies, local governments, industry, campers, and others.