

**Written Public Testimony of C. Randy Dye
State Forester of West Virginia
President of the National Association of State Foresters**

**Submitted to the House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy and Forestry**

May 18, 2012

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony to the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Conservation, Energy and Forestry regarding the reauthorization of the Farm Bill. State Foresters deliver technical and financial assistance, and forest health, water and wildfire protection for more than two-thirds of America's forests. The USDA Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service provide vital support for delivering these services alongside other socioeconomic and environmental health benefits in both rural and urban areas.

The Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 (2008 Farm Bill) set into motion landmark changes in the way trees and forests will be managed, conserved, used and enjoyed today and for future generations. It provided new guidance on how forestry agencies and programs identify and prioritize national, regional and state forest management goals. Specifically, each state and U.S. territory was called on to complete a Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy. These "Forest Action Plans" provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends in each state and delineate priority rural and urban forest landscape issues and areas. Further, they provide long-term plans for investing state, federal, and other resources to where they can most effectively stimulate or leverage desired action and engage multiple partners.

State Foresters completed their Forest Action Plans in June 2010 and management activities are now underway to respond to the following trends, issues and priorities:

Forest Pests and Invasive Plants

Among the greatest threats identified in the Forest Action Plans are exotic forest pests and invasive species. The growing number of damaging pests is often a result of the introduction and spread by way of wooden shipping materials, movement of firewood and through various types of recreation. These pests have the potential to displace native trees, shrubs and other vegetation types in forests. The Forest Service estimates that hundreds of native and nonnative insects and diseases damage the nation's forests each year. In 2009, approximately 12 million acres suffered mortality from insects and diseases.¹ These losses impact the availability of clean and abundant water, wildlife habitat, clean air and other environmental services. Further, extensive areas of high insect or disease mortality can set the stage for large-scale, catastrophic wildfire.

¹ Man, Gary. 2010. Major Forest Insect and Disease Conditions in the United States: 2009 Update. Last accessed on March, 7, 2012 at: http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/publications/ConditionsReport_09_final.pdf

Fuel Loads and Wildland Fire

More people in fire-prone landscapes, high fuel loads, drought and at-risk landscapes are among the factors that have led State Foresters to identify wildland fire as a significant priority issue in their Forest Action Plans. These factors have created a wildland fire situation that has become increasingly expensive, complex and, in many cases, threatens human life and property. In 2011, over 74,000 wildland fires burned more than 8.7 million acres.² In the wake of these larger fires, the number of structures destroyed also surpassed the annual average with over 5,200 structures, including nearly 3,500 residences.¹ Of the 66,700 communities across the country currently at risk of wildland fire, only 21 percent are prepared for wildland fire.³

Forest loss and impairments to forested watersheds

Working forest landscapes are a key part of the rural landscape and provide an estimated 900,000 jobs, in addition to clean water, wood products and other essential services to millions of Americans. For instance, 80 percent of renewable biomass energy comes from wood, 53 percent of all freshwater in the U.S. originates on forest land and more than \$200 billion in sales of consumer products and services are provided through the nation's forests each year.⁴ Working forests are necessary to help the forest products industry recover and (re)employ nearly 300,000 full-time jobs that have been lost over the past five years as a result of the economic downturn.⁵

Private forests make up two-thirds of all the forestland in the United States and support an average of eight jobs per 1,000 acres.⁶ The ability of working forests to continue providing jobs, renewable energy, clean and abundant water and other important services is in jeopardy as private forests are lost to commercial and residential development. The Forest Service estimates that 57 million acres of private forests in the U.S. are at risk of conversion to urban development over the next two decades.

Urban and Community Forest Management Challenges

Urban forests provide environmental, social and economic benefits to the more than 84% of Americans who live in metropolitan areas. Forest Action Plans identified a number of benefits associated with urban forests including energy savings, improved air quality, neighborhood stability, aesthetic values, reduced noise and improved quality of life for communities across the country. At the same time, the plans reported a number of threats to urban and community forests including fire in the wildland urban interface (WUI), urbanization and development, invasive plants and insects, diseases and others.

As the House Agriculture Committee considers reauthorization of the Farm Bill, ***State Foresters recommend that the 2012 Farm Bill provide the necessary financial and analytical support for implementing (and updating) the Forest Action Plans.*** Further, NASF joins the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition in supporting the following four key priorities in the 2012 Farm Bill and offer recommendations within each priority area that, if enacted, would provide the essential tools for responding to priorities identified in the Forest Action Plans:

² National Interagency Fire Center, Historical Wildland Fire Summaries, pg. 9. Last accessed February 1, 2012 at http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/2011_statsum/intro_summary.pdf.

³ National Association of State Foresters, Communities at Risk Report FY2011. Last accessed February 1, 2012 at <http://www.stateforesters.org/files/2011-NASF-finalCAR-report-FY11.pdf>

⁴ Society of American Foresters. *The State of America's Forests*. 2007.

⁵ Guldin, R.W. and W. B. Smith. *Forest Sector Reeling During Economic Downturn*. 2012. Last accessed on-line at: http://www.nxtbook.com/nxtbooks/saf/forestrysource_201201/index.php?startid=1

⁶ Forest2Market. *The Economic Impact of Privately-Owned Forests*. 2009.

Including strong provisions for forests in conservation programs

Farm Bill conservation programs are crucial to helping private forest landowners to address stewardship of their forests. Through voluntary partnerships and cooperative conservation efforts between USDA, state foresters, conservation districts and private landowners, Conservation Title programs help to sustain the long term productivity and economic viability of forestry by helping manage private forest lands. The demand for programs such as the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) outstrip available funds by two to three times. Through the appropriations process, mandatory farm bill conservation programs have been cut by over \$2 billion since the last Farm Bill. Conservation Title programs have already contributed to deficit reduction via appropriations and should not be asked to contribute more than their fair share.

NASF supports potential consolidation of Conservation Title programs provided that forest landowner eligibility is maintained in a streamlined program. ***We recommend the 10% cap on the number of forested acres enrolled in CSP be removed to allow forest owners the same access to the program enjoyed by farmers and ranchers.***

Strengthening forestry outreach, education, research, and inventory programs

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, managed by the USDA Forest Service, is the nation's only comprehensive forest inventory system for assessing the health and sustainability of the nation's forests across all ownerships. FIA provides essential data related to forest species composition, forest growth rates, and forest health. The program also delivers baseline inventory estimates used in state Forest Action Plans. The Program provides unbiased information that serves as the basis for monitoring trends in wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, predicting spread of invasive species and responding to priorities identified in the Forest Action Plans. ***NASF supports providing strategic direction for implementation of the FIA program including (among other things):***

- Completing transition to a fully annualized program including Interior Alaska
- Reporting information on renewable biomass supplies and carbon stocks
- Engaging state foresters and other users of FIA data in re-evaluating the list of core data variables
- Fostering greater cooperation among the FIA program, research station leaders, and state foresters
- Understanding and reporting on changes in land cover and use
- Implementing an annualized inventory of trees in urban settings

Combating forest-related invasive species

The Early Plant Pest Detection and Surveillance Improvement Program at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service is vital to rapid detection and response to destructive invasive pests. ***NASF supports continued authorization and funding for the program (\$50MM/yr) as authorized in the last Farm Bill. We also recommend direction and emphasis be given to APHIS to continue delivering the program in response to forest insect and diseases in coordination with the Forest Service.***

Improving forest market opportunities

The Biobased Markets Program was authorized in the Farm Bill and was designed to “increase the purchase and use of biobased products.” USDA has excluded most forest products in the program citing that Congress intended the program for “new” markets. The exclusion of forest

products in the program has created a market disadvantage even though forestry materials are some of the most biobased products in existence. State Foresters support amending the program to clarify that forest products are allowed to participate in the program regardless of their date of entry into the market place.

The stewardship contracting authority has been successfully used throughout the U.S. to improve forest health, stimulate forest-based economies and to improve collaborative project development among diverse constituencies. NASF supports the permanent authorization of the stewardship contracting authority, which is currently set to expire in 2013. Permanent authorization will help to ensure that the authority is institutionalized within the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management as one of the tools available to natural resource managers to address ongoing forest health issues. Following permanent reauthorization, NASF stands ready to work with our partners to improve the effectiveness of the authority by addressing issues such as the potential for longer term contracts.

NASF recommends reauthorizing the Cooperative National Forest Products Marketing Program given the changing markets and economic trends identified in the Forest Action Plans. The program is designed to aid small and medium-sized firms (and private forest landowners) with marketing efforts to improve the competitiveness of the U.S. forest products industry. State Foresters recommend placing emphasis on market development and assistance consistent with the Forest Action Plans.

In addition to the above recommendations related to the Coalition priorities, NASF supports the following forestry-related provisions as part of any reauthorization of the Farm Bill:

- ***Reauthorize the Watershed Forestry Assistance Program.*** To help states and their partners address impairments to forested watersheds, NASF recommends reauthorizing the Watershed Forestry Assistance Program with program delivery guided by priorities in the Forest Action Plans. The program provides technical and financial assistance in support of projects in urban and rural areas that used trees and forests as solutions to water quality problems.
- ***Authorize study of the role of private forestlands and their contribution to national security.*** NASF recommends that the 2012 Farm Bill authorize a USDA lead study in coordination with the Secretaries of Defense and Interior to assess needs, opportunities and recommendations for pilot projects for enhancing and rewarding the management of private forestlands that directly or indirectly contribute to the missions of military bases and installations, promote energy independence, assure the availability of large scale water supplies and other matters of consequence to critical infrastructure in the U.S.
- ***Confirm that the BMP approach is the appropriate regulatory option for forestry activities by including HR 2594 as part of the Farm Bill reauthorization.*** Under the Clean Water Act, non-point sources of runoff from forest roads and forestry activities have been successfully addressed through state-developed BMPs and related state laws, regulations and guidance for the past 35 years. In May 2011, the *NEDC v. Brown* decision in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that stormwater runoff from forest roads are “point sources” and subject to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permitting requirements under of the Clean Water Act. This decision was delivered despite the fact that the nation’s 750 million acres of forests (one third of the land base in the U.S.) contribute to less than five percent of river and stream miles identified as water-quality impaired. The efficacy of state-based BMP programs must be recognized to avoid

unnecessary and burdensome regulations that forest landowners will be subject to and state agencies will lack the resources to administer. Congress must provide the certainty needed for long-term management of this critical national resource by both public and private owners.

- ***Eliminate duplicative permitting requirements for pesticide applications by including HR 872 as part of the 2012 Farm Bill.*** NASF holds concerns regarding the new NPDES permitting requirements for pesticide applications under the Clean Water Act. The Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act has provided sufficient protection for the past three decades by requiring rigorous examinations of potential impacts of pesticides on water quality and environmental and human health. Maintaining the environmental integrity of a watershed often involves the use of pesticides to control invasive species, manage riparian areas and reestablishing forests.

These recommendations represent conclusions and consensus viewpoints driven by Forest Action Plans authorized in part by the last Farm Bill, and are offered as a source of guidance that we trust will be helpful to you in developing forest policy provisions in the next Farm Bill. State Foresters greatly appreciate the significant task as Congress works to reduce the federal deficit. We know the Agriculture Committees will continue to work to ensure that cuts affecting forestry are proportionate and fair to other sectors of the economy. We greatly appreciate the opportunity from the Subcommittee to submit oral and written testimony regarding the forestry, conservation and energy provisions of the 2012 Farm Bill.