

RESOLUTION Number 2013-4

ORIGIN OF RESOLUTION: Council of Western State Foresters and NASF Forest Resources Management Committee

ISSUE OF CONCERN:

Federal forests face forest health problems (insects, disease, wildfire, invasive species) of staggering magnitude. The agencies charged with managing these forests also face serious challenges from cumbersome regulations, declining budgets coupled with high administrative costs and increasing fire suppression expenses, and the departure of employees with institutional knowledge and skills to manage forest lands. The current level of active management on federal forest lands is insufficient to address the scope, scale and pace needed to restore these forests to a more resilient condition. Uncharacteristically large and intense wildfires and insect epidemics are impacting federal forest lands in acreages that dwarf the agencies' accomplishments in actively managing forests to improve their resiliency.

Compounding the problem, rural forested communities and counties near federal lands are experiencing high unemployment where jobs were historically linked with forest-derived industries and services. This creates declining incomes and budgets for schools, infrastructure, and other essential government services. Forest management and wood products manufacturing, and the associated workforce skilled in timber harvesting, road maintenance, trucking, and mill operations, are also declining, if not disappearing altogether. Without a viable forest products sector, ongoing forest management activities to maintain long-term sustainability will not be possible. Clearly, there is a need for significant changes in federal policy for management of federal forest lands under the management authority of the USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior.

BACKGROUND:

As decision makers at all levels of government – local, state and federal – continue the debate of federal forest management, the ecological function and values provided by millions of acres are being altered by insects, disease, invasive species, and uncharacteristic wildfire. There are a growing number of congressional proposals recommending significant changes to the legislative framework, analysis and project development process, and the governance of non-reserved federal forest lands to accelerate treatment and restoration. The pace and scale of active forest management must increase substantially to begin to restore our federal forests to a more sustainable, resilient condition, and to provide the continued benefits of a viable forest products business sector, clean air, clean water, recreation opportunities, wildlife habitat, and commodities for our nation's economy.

RESOLUTION:

BE IT RESOLVED that the National Association of State Foresters supports efforts to reform current policy concerning management of federal forest lands and believes Congress and the Administration should adopt the following principles.

- I. Sustainability** – Management must be focused on ensuring that all three elements of sustainability (social, economic, and ecological) are equally considered and provided for in planning, and on-the-ground management of federal forest lands. The three elements must be rebalanced and not overly focused on one or two alone.
- II. Process** – The current process for planning and implementing priority projects on federal forest lands is time intensive, expensive, and often fails to reward collaborative efforts between stakeholders. Existing legal frameworks were developed before federal forest lands management focus shifted to the current paradigm of restoration and maintenance. They envisioned a broad-scale analysis process that set the basis for simple, efficient, and timely project-scale planning. This model has not worked in practice, and instead has created a conflicting and contradictory legal structure that has greatly constrained federal forest land managers in implementing priority projects. Real reform to both the legal structure and internal federal agency processes are needed to reduce the time and effort to plan and successfully implement federal forest projects on a large scale.
- III. Outcome Focus** – Current federal agency performance measures for federal forest lands need to be revised to match management objectives that achieve balance of the three elements of sustainability. For example, clear and measureable acreage targets should be established for annual treatment on priority forest lands, as identified by federal forest plans, or other documents such as Land and Resource Management Plans, State Forest Action Plans, and Community Wildfire Protection Plans.
- IV. Land-Use Allocations** – Simplifying, clarifying, and realigning land-use allocations at a broad level is an integral part of securing more stable project activities. Timber production should be identified in forest plans as a critical use and method to achieve forest management goals on a portion of non-reserved federal forest lands. Other models of land tenure such as state management demonstration projects, the state trust lands concept, permanent land reservations, and ecologically-driven restoration objectives should be evaluated for other portions of the land base.
- V. Collaboration** – Legislation should identify collaboration and participation among stakeholders as essential to project planning and implementation. Provisions should be developed that encourage stakeholder agreement and shield projects reaching consensus among stakeholders from legal challenges by uninvolved parties.

NASF ACTION:

- Approved
- Disapproved
- Tabled

DATE OF ACTION: September 26, 2013