April 27, 2018

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Tom Udall  
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall:

The administration’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget proposal would have significant adverse consequences for the nation’s forests, over 60 percent of which are state or privately owned. We believe that investments in key federal programs to conserve and improve America’s forests—rural and urban, private and public—are critically important. These investments create jobs, mitigate pollution and carbon emissions, enhance and protect our drinking water, contribute to healthy and livable communities, and encourage forest product innovation and utilization—helping the nation to foster strong economic growth in rural areas.

State foresters deliver technical and financial assistance to protect forest health (and the many benefits healthy forests provide) with help from USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry programs. The comprehensive processes for delivering their services are articulated in each state’s Forest Action Plan, which were authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill and reauthorized in the 2014 Farm Bill.

We thank you for your continued support of State and Private Forestry programs in the FY18 Omnibus bill. In FY19, sustained funding for these programs will help improve the health of the nation’s forests and encourage economic growth in a sector that sustains more than one million jobs in the United States. Our FY19 funding level requests include:

**State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Programs**

Fire-prone landscapes, adversely affected by drought and high fuel loads, have been identified as priority areas for treatment by many state foresters in their state Forest Action Plans. This is because wildland fires have become increasingly expensive and more complicated to suppress, and often threaten human life and property. For instance, in 2017, over 71,000 wildfires consumed more than ten million acres and 8,000 homes. Eighty-one percent of those fires were on state and private lands. Additionally, across the nation, local responders and state forestry agencies are the primary initial attack for wildland fire response.
SFA and VFA are the federal mechanisms for assisting states and local fire departments in responding to wildfires and in conducting management activities that mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. SFA helps train and equip local first responders who are often first to arrive at a federal wildland fire incident and play a crucial role in keeping fires and their costs as small as possible.

In FY15, these two programs delivered more than $169 million in equipment to state and local first responders. A small investment of SFA funds supports state forestry agencies in accessing and repurposing equipment from the Federal Excess Personal Property and the Firefighter Property programs.

NASF supports funding the State Fire Assistance program at $87 million and Volunteer Fire Assistance at $16 million in FY19. The need for increased funding for fire suppression has broad support and the administration’s budget recommends a significant funding increase to meet the anticipated fire threat on federal lands. Increased fire suppression funding for state and private lands, many of which are interspersed with federal lands, is just as urgent.

Forest Health Management Program on Cooperative Lands
State Forest Action Plans have also identified pests and diseases as being significant forest threats. The USDA Forest Service estimates hundreds of native and non-native insects and diseases cause damage to the nation’s public and private forests each year. A growing number of damaging pests and diseases are introduced and spread by way of wooden shipping materials, movement of firewood, and through various types of recreation.

In 2010, approximately 6.4 million forested acres suffered mortality from insects and diseases\(^1\) and an estimated 81.3 million acres are at risk of attack over the next 15 years.\(^2\) These losses threaten clean and abundant water availability, wildlife habitat, clean air, and other environmental services provided by forests. Furthermore, extensive tree mortality sets the stage for large-scale, catastrophic wildfire.

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program supports state activities related to prevention, monitoring, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants through technical and financial assistance. Because forest pests and disease know no bounds, controlling pests on private lands can stop millions of dollars in damage to public lands and vice versa.

NASF supports funding the Forest Health Management on Cooperative Lands Program at $48 million and on National Forests at $59 million for FY19.

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Forest Stewardship Program
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. However, 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.

The Forest Stewardship Program is routinely identified in state Forest Action Plans as keeping working forests intact and providing public benefits, including protecting watershed health, wildlife habitat, and neighboring public lands. On the ground, almost 90 percent of landowners who have forest stewardship plans implement them, and those landowners with a plan are nearly three times more likely to actively manage their forest compared those who don’t have a plan. Additionally, almost 50 percent of the nation’s wood supply comes from small landowners, who are the target of this program, and in 2017, this program assisted over 323,000 landowners.

NASF supports funding the Forest Stewardship Program at $29 million in FY19. The need to increase funding on state and private lands to support active management is urgent.

Forest Legacy Program
The Forest Legacy Program provides critical federal assistance to states and private landowners to keep working forests working through permanent conservation easements, and in some cases, fee acquisitions. Each easement acquisition is required to have a long-term forest stewardship plan.

Working forests play an important role in sustaining the economic, ecological, and social well-being of America’s rural and urban areas through the jobs they support and the benefits they provide, such as wildfire threat reduction, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation space.

NASF supports funding the Forest Legacy Program at $62 million (net funding level) in FY19. NASF also supports the program being fully funded from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and asks that it not be included in the discretionary budget cap. NASF recommends report language requiring coordination with state foresters prior to recommendation and selection of easements and acquisitions due to land management considerations and tax implications.

Urban and Community Forestry Program
Community forests are important to achieving energy savings, improved air quality, reduced noise, stability in home values, and improved health and quality of life in municipalities and communities around the country. In fact, studies show community trees and forests reduce cases of childhood asthma, mitigate the impacts of auto exhaust, reduce home heating and air-

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conditioning costs, provide economically viable solutions for storm water management, and even reduce crime rates.

Community forests have been shown to provide environmental, social, and economic benefits to the more than 249 million Americans annually. Yet, urban and community forests face serious threats, such as development and urbanization, invasive pests and diseases, and fire in the wildland-urban interface.

Since its expansion under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1990, the Urban and Community Forestry Program has provided technical and financial assistance to an average of 8,200 communities annually. The program is delivered in close partnership with state foresters and leverages federal dollars 2:1 with existing local efforts to help communities manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces.

*NASF supports funding the Urban and Community Forestry Program at $31 million in FY19.*

**Forest Inventory and Analysis Program**
America’s “Forest Census,” made possible through the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program, is the foundation for addressing the nation’s forest health. The program enables forest managers to understand the scope and scale of forest condition trends and to make projections of future conditions through extensive data collection on everything from forest species composition to forest growth rates.

When sufficiently funded, FIA measures plots every five years in the East and every ten years in the West. The forest industry, a sector which provides at least 2.8 million U.S. jobs (more than the automobile manufacturing industry), uses this data routinely to make management and investment decisions.

The program also provides unbiased information for monitoring trends in wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, predicting spread of invasive species and for solving many other resource questions. It is a particularly important tool used in the development of Forest Action Plans.

*NASF supports funding the Forest Inventory and Analysis program at $83 million in FY19.*

**Landscape Scale Restoration Program**
Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) projects allow states to collaborate with the USDA Forest Service and other partners to address critical forest priorities on a national scale. LSR projects focus only on the most critical national priorities identified in each state’s Forest Action Plan, and as a result, drives meaningful and cost-effective results.

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The LSR program was codified in the 2008 Farm bill and a LSR budget line item was subsequently included in FY14 appropriations. Regional review teams comprised of state and federal officials carry out rigorous reviews of proposed LSR projects, and as a result, projects selected for funding are ground-truthed, landscape-scale, cross-boundary, and outcome-driven.

*NASF supports funding the Landscape Scale Restoration program at $23 million in FY19. NASF does not support increases in this program coming at the expense of other programs described above. NASF also supports current legislative efforts to codify this program.*

State foresters assist in strengthening the economic backbone of communities across the nation and the health of the forests surrounding them. We appreciate your consideration of our requests and would welcome an opportunity to discuss how your committee can support our work.

Sincerely,

George Geissler
NASF President
Oklahoma State Forester

Attachment
## NASF FY 2019 Appropriations Recommendations

### NASF Priority Programs

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*The Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) Program funds national priorities in the federally mandated State Forest Action Plans.

**While the enacted level was $67 million, approximately $6 million was rescinded, so that the "net" appropriated was approximately $61 million.

***Much of the nation’s initial and extended attack resources are funded by SFA/VFA programs. In a typical year 80% of the nation’s wildfires and almost 50% of the acreage burned are state and private forests. In addition when responding out of jurisdiction the majority of the time that SFA and VFA resources are responding to wildfires, they are responding on federal forest lands. Investments upfront in SFA/VFA prevention and initial attack capabilities, should help reduce federal wildfire suppression costs and hence proposed increases should be mirror increases in wildfire suppression funding for federal resources.

In Admin Proposed FY19 Budget: Forest Stewardship Program has been renamed Working Forest Lands. State and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs have been renamed National and Rural Fire Capacity Programs.