

NASF Forest Invasive Species Management Policy Statement

Prepared by NASF Forest Science & Health Committee

Approved by NASF Executive Committee August 31, 2012

[Adopted as NASF Membership Resolution 2012-1 on September 19, 2012]

Purpose of NASF Forest Invasive Species Management and Policy Statement

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) encourages forest management practices that build greater resistance and resiliency to invasive species, but it is inevitable that not all invasive species can be controlled. While recognizing the critical and primary importance of prevention programs, the focus of this management and policy statement is dealing with invasive species once they have arrived, which is an uncomfortable, but increasingly familiar role for many State foresters. Priorities must be set that balance the costs and benefits of action as well as inaction. These statements provide both a management and policy context, based on many years of experience and lessons learned, to assist NASF and its partners in making the best decisions possible in establishing priorities and making choices for invasive species management programs.

Note: For this statement “invasive species” means an species that is not native to a particular ecosystem or region, whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.

Introduction

The impacts of invasive forest insect and diseases species on our nation’s forests have become an increasing concern for NASF. These invasive species, such as Asian Long-horned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, Gypsy Moth, Sudden Oak Death, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, and Cogongrass inflict significant economic burdens from the: 1) loss of urban tree cover, 2) costs to remove and replace infected trees, 3) disruption of natural and agricultural systems, 4) diminishing of biodiversity and ecosystem services, and, 5) loss of economic value of timber and raw material to support domestic industries and provide renewable, US-made wood products for consumers. Yet the nation’s current protection system is piecemeal; it lacks adequate rigor and comprehensiveness, virtually ensuring that invasive species will continue to arrive and spread. Preventing species from reaching our shores combined with an early detection and rapid response capability remains the most effective option to reduce the impacts.... but federal and state investments to achieve this are in the decline.

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NASF's programs and stewardship actions are on the front lines of eradicating, slowing the spread, and addressing the enormous collateral damage of invasive species. For example a recent study found that wood boring insects such as the Emerald Ash Borer and Asian Longhorned Beetle are having a significant economic impact resulting in approximately \$1.7 billion in local government expenditures and \$830 million in lost residential property values each year.

Management and Policy Statements

The National Association of State Foresters believes that:

- Prevention is the best management option, yet it is one of the hardest to implement because of its regulatory nature. It is important to acknowledge that judicious and focused use of regulations is often necessary to provide the desired protection for forest resources as well as providing a supporting framework for public outreach activities. Regulations are only effective when they can be adequately implemented and enforced. Where regulations are not working they should be reviewed and revised as needed to achieve workable and desired outcomes.
- Practical and sustainable management strategies and policies to reduce the impacts of nonnative invasive forest species are most effective when focused on clearly defined, measurable goals and based on current biological and socio-economic information. Actions must be applied rapidly, even when "perfect" knowledge is lacking, as the costs of no action can be high.
- The impacts of invasive species issues can easily transcend state and regional boundaries, making cooperative approaches among states and willing partners necessary. Where capable, individual states have a responsibility to respond when known damaging invasive species are found, or ask for assistance when needed.
- While terms differ, there are three main options for dealing with established invasive species: 1) *eradication*; 2) *control*; and 3) *mitigation*. *Eradication* is the elimination of the entire population of species in questions, and encompasses all life stages. *Control* is the long-term reduction in density and abundance of an invasive species to below a pre-set acceptable threshold. If these first two management strategies cannot be employed,

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the remaining option is *mitigation* of the impacts of the invasive species, finding the best ways in which to “live with it.”

- Priority species for rapid response are those: 1) known or suspected to be invasive but still found in small numbers; 2) that can alter ecosystem processes; 3) that are invading areas of high conservation or economic value; and 4) whose infestations are likely to be eradicated successfully.
- Many expensive invasive species control programs could be avoided with early action. There is always a need to consider the cost of taking no action with a rapid but credible response when a new invasive species is found. This information needs to be transmitted to policy makers as they consider their proposed action in terms of avoided costs in the long-term versus the costs of no action in the short-term. The use of existing screening systems for invasiveness should be improved and further utilized. Recent federal regulations that require an assessment of risk before plants can be introduced is such an example. These systems need to be fairly incorporated into the “cost of doing business” as public taxpayers should not bear the sole responsibility and costs to use these systems.
- *Slow the Spread* programs, which slow the rate of natural spread of invasive species have been successfully applied by using integrated pest management strategies and accelerating research in new suppression technologies (e.g. biological control).
- Since human behavior leads to most invasions, solutions will need to influence this behavior by addressing the socio-economic causes for introductions and the costs to prevent and control them. Priorities have historically been based on threats to environmental resources, but political and public support should be factored into priority decisions. Targeted marketing and communications efforts, such as the Don’t Move Firewood (dontmovefirewood.org) campaign to raise awareness of this issue with key stakeholders, are critical investments.
- Depending on public perception, some species will be harder to target than others, requiring intensive public awareness campaigns and convincing arguments. Local communities need realistic mitigation options that are affordable and within their capabilities. Legal authorities need to be in place for appropriate entities to take quick action when overall public interest is threatened.
- A pest by pest approach to dealing with invasive species has some benefit, but addressing the specific import and transport pathways to reduce rates of introduction, survival, and establishment of invasive species continues to be the priority prevention option. This

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can be enhanced through voluntary incentive-based programs that promote best management practices with businesses involved in live plants, firewood, wood pallets, etc., including consideration of expanded certification systems for key industries.

State/Federal Partnerships

Federal government involvement with states is critical as specific federal legislation (e.g. inter-state commerce, plant protection) limit certain state actions. A successful forest invasive species prevention and control program must address the complexity and wide-ranging agency and community needs at the regional, state, and local level. The National Association of State Foresters believes that:

- ❖ Federal agencies (e.g., USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service) should coordinate with appropriate state agencies as well as their traditional state agricultural agency partners in addressing forest invasive pests. If desired, state agencies should be provided the option to have a lead role in deciding what programs, regulations and initiatives are needed and best suited to protect forest resources within their respective states. In most cases state agencies have better knowledge and contacts with local stakeholders and community-based organizations that have developed tactics and programs to combat invasive species at the local level (e.g., county representatives, utilities).
- ❖ Where federal forests dominate ownership at a local or regional level, Federal Agencies should partner strategically with state forestry agencies to minimize the potential of spread between adjoining private or state forest land and identify opportunities for cost-effective treatment.
- ❖ A federal program should include initiatives that are non-regulatory and incentive driven, support and build capacity at the state, regional, and community level, and encourage voluntary cooperation of affected private entities and communities.
- ❖ Implementation of current management plans developed by coordinated efforts of state agencies and affected local constituents can help build the framework to begin or enhance larger scale regional strategies.
- ❖ Investments to support local, state, and regional partnerships, which are prepared to take immediate action against known priority invasive species, will provide valuable lessons

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for others and promote innovations and efficiencies in protection and public outreach strategies. By sharing their progress, these partnerships will, in turn, help identify the policy and legal obstacles to success as well as build a constituency for more effective invasive species prevention and control programs in other areas.

Recommended Strategies

Consistent with the management and policy statements described above, the NASF supports the followings strategies:

- Establishment of a state-level rapid response capacity that can quickly eradicate priority forest invasive species.
- Non-regulatory and incentive-driven national programs, with specific focus on encouraging voluntary cooperation.
- Adoption and enforcement of workable national regulatory programs may be considered to address key pathways such as firewood movement where non-regulatory approaches are not in place, effective or, simply, to serve as a “backstop” for those voluntary approaches.
- Establishment of a federal cost-share grant program to support new, and augment existing, public and private forest invasive species response, management and restoration efforts in areas and communities that have been impacted by harmful non-native forest insects and diseases.
- Development of procedures that resolve jurisdictional and other disputes in an effort to improve coordination of Federal agencies, and between Federal and State agencies. A network of partners is needed with agreed upon authorities, responsibilities, and roles.
- Cooperative sharing of information through a centralized web-based system.
- Increase research capacity in efforts to quickly assess impacts of potential invasive species identify, test, and deploy bio-control agents, develop management tools for mitigation and suppression, and genetic and breeding programs designed to enhance resistance of high priority tree species.