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State Foresters Concerned that President's Budget Will Fall Short in Meeting Conservation Goals on All Lands

Washington DC, February 11, 2010 – State foresters responded to President Obama's February 1st budget proposal for FY2011 with some trepidation, warning that cuts to significant forestry programs will likely not meet national forest conservation goals. Even in a tight budget climate, the members of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) believe it is critically important to make solid investments in key federal programs that help realize the potential of America's forests in helping address climate mitigation, renewable energy production and job creation.

As stewards of the more than two-thirds of America's forests in state and private ownership, state foresters deliver outreach, technical and financial assistance as well as wildfire protection through the State and Private Forestry (S&PF) mission area of the U.S. Forest Service. S&PF programs leverage the capacity of state agencies to provide vital assistance to forest landowners, tribes and communities to restore, manage, and protect their forests and green spaces.

The President's budget reflected serious cuts to several priority forestry programs, including State Fire Assistance, a crucial tool in the national arsenal against wildfire, as well as Forest Inventory and Analysis, the only national inventory system that delivers timely and consistent information about the condition and trends of America's forestland across all ownerships. Other critical program areas such as Forest Stewardship and Urban & Community Forestry continue to be underfunded.

This June, state and territorial forestry agencies will complete and begin implementing individual Statewide Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies, which identify and prioritize forest management goals and provide long-term plans for investing state, federal, and other resources where they can make the most impact. The Assessments and Strategies consider all lands in a state, conserve and improve America's forests on all lands—rural and urban, public and private—in assessing forest health needs and conservation opportunities.

The budget does include a positive first step toward implementing the administration's "all-lands approach," as described by USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack. The secretary's "shared vision for America's forests" recognizes that the spectrum of Forest Service responsibilities extends beyond national forests and includes stewardship of state and private lands. Funding for a new Integrated Resource Restoration budget line item for the National Forest System will allow for greater local decision-making in addressing priority issues and landscapes on National Forest System lands, and provides support for integrating those identified in State Assessments. State Foresters caution, however, that the new approach should not limit the implementation of existing national forest management plans.

"State forestry agencies are addressing priority issues and critical landscapes to maximize federal, state and private investment in America's forests," said NASF President and Maryland State Forester Steven W. Koehn. "Cuts to State and Private Forestry programs will ultimately lead to reduced capacity to deliver on a shared vision for America's forests."

NASF has developed recommendations on targeted funding levels for a suite of priority forestry programs. These investments will increase the scale and pace of the forest stewardship work required for federal and state partners to meet our shared responsibility to care for the nation's forests. Visit www.stateforesters.org for more information.

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of forestry agencies from the fifty states, eight U.S. territories and associated states, and the District of Columbia.