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State Foresters Urge Budget Compromises that Don't Compromise Forests

Washington DC, February 24, 2011 – State Foresters responded to the release of President Obama's fiscal year 2012 budget last week by urging the Administration and Congress to adopt a bipartisan approach to budget compromises that does not compromise America's forests and forest economies. The nation's forest infrastructure, just like roads and schools, provides public benefits including jobs, clean air, clean water, and wildlife. As stewards of the more than two-thirds of America's forests, State Foresters effectively deliver Forest Service State & Private Forestry and other federal programs serving the forestlands that produce most of the nation's forest products and are at most risk from commercial and residential development.

As States continue to face some of the worst fiscal conditions since the Great Depression, federal funding is more important than ever to ensure continued public benefits from forests. "At a time when government's investment ability is limited, State Foresters are well positioned to prioritize needs, leverage federal funds, and focus limited investment where it produces the greatest public good. State Foresters are focused on return on investment, not just investment," said National Association of State Foresters (NASF) President and Colorado State Forester Jeff Jahnke. "Colorado's State Forest Assessment and Strategy confirms that protecting the public and conserving our forests requires an integrated approach. Regardless of funding levels, I can do more on the land if provided flexibility to apply federal resources in a way that responds to the trends, threats and priorities identified in our state's forest assessment."

NASF is also interested in the Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) Account concept outlined for the National Forest System if it provides managers more flexibility, helps respond to priorities in the State Forest Resource Assessments and Strategies (forest action plans) and holds managers accountable for outcomes. However, the proposed Forest Service budget reductions to State Fire Assistance, Volunteer Fire Assistance, Cooperative Forest Health and other State and Private Forestry programs are inconsistent with the findings of the forest action plans which have identified insect, disease, invasive species, and wildfire as significant threats in nearly every state. Significant reductions to these important programs conflict with the Administration's "all-lands" vision and goals set forth in the America's Great Outdoor's initiative.

Each state's forest action plan relies upon FIA as a source of credible unbiased data for assessing wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, and resource sustainability questions that span forest ownerships. State Foresters are concerned that the proposed 14% reduction to the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program will increase the inventory cycle length and otherwise dismantle program delivery when the agency and its partners rely on the information to respond to priorities in the state forest action plans.

The members of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF) look forward to working with Congress, the Administration, and our partners to ensure that needed budget compromises don't compromise our nation's forests.

The National Association of State Foresters is comprised of the directors of state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia. NASF seeks to advance sustainable forestry, conservation, and protection of forest lands and their associated resources. <http://www.stateforesters.org>

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