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Robust Forest Census Needed for Comprehensive Carbon Data

Washington, DC, October 15, 2010 – State Foresters responded to federal estimates of the total carbon storage of U.S. forests today by calling for a current and accurate forest inventory to better address issues of climate change, biomass, and land use in the nation's forests.

The USDA Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program is the official forest register used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for reporting on U.S. forest carbon stocks under national and international reporting obligations. According to data released by the Forest Service, U.S. forests currently store 41.4 billion metric tons of carbon and the amount of carbon stored in forestland has increased over the past two decades. The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is encouraged by the findings, but cautions that a comprehensive picture of forest carbon capacity is still elusive.

"A current and accurate forest inventory is a threshold requirement if we are to conserve and prepare America's forests for the impacts of climate change and a stronger contribution to domestic energy needs," said NASF President and Colorado State Forester Jeff Jahnke. "Unfortunately, portions of the nation's forests are not being inventoried and the program needs to be enhanced to provide data relevant to current and emerging issues."

The FIA program is the nation's "forest census" and the only comprehensive forest inventory system for assessing the health and sustainability of the nation's forests. State Foresters believe that the following improvements to FIA are essential in producing reliable, meaningful carbon data as well as responding to priorities identified in each Statewide Forest Resource Assessment and Strategy:

- Achieve a comprehensive, timely inventory. States such as Wyoming, Nevada, Hawaii and interior Alaska have not been inventoried under the program and other states lack timely updates.
- Employ a finer-scale in spatial assessments. An enhanced FIA program is necessary to provide reliable estimates of forest carbon stocks at smaller spatial scales as well as other carbon pools such as belowground biomass and soil.
- Include urban trees and forests. The trees and forests in communities across the country play a critical role in reducing carbon emissions, yet estimates of their carbon stocks are not provided through the FIA program.

State forestry agencies are key partners with the USDA Forest Service in conducting the vital work of FIA and have encouraged the agency to fully implement the base FIA program nationwide. For more information, visit www.stateforesters.org/FIA.

NASF represents the directors of forestry agencies from the fifty states, eight U.S. territories and associated states, and the District of Columbia.

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