March 21, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi, House Minority Leader
The Honorable Mitch McConnell, Senate Majority Leader
The Honorable Chuck Schumer, Senate Minority Leader

Speaker Ryan, Minority Leader Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, and Minority Leader Schumer:

We wanted to thank you and your staff for working tirelessly to reach a bipartisan resolution on wildfire suppression funding and a set of meaningful federal forest reforms.

As we understand it, the wildfire funding resolution will permanently stop the raiding of the USDA Forest Service’s non-wildfire suppression programs, which include the agency’s State and Private Forestry programs.

With on-the-ground direction from state forestry agencies, these critically important programs support the conservation of more than 60% of the forests in the United States. State foresters, and the agencies they direct, use these programs to enhance the health, resilience, and productivity of state and private forests through wildfire prevention and suppression activities, pest and disease management, and technical assistance programs for private landowners.

Every state, regardless of whether it contains a national forest, will benefit from your wildfire funding fix. Every state will also benefit from the equally important federal forest management reforms you’ve agreed to. As you know, forest threats know no boundaries, so when wildfire, insects, or disease hit a national forest, neighboring private and state forests are hit too.

Additionally:

- Your expansion of Good Neighbor Authority will allow the nation’s state foresters to work on neighboring federal lands to improve the health of federal forests more often than we were previously permitted.

- Additional categorical exclusion authority will allow the USDA Forest Service to eliminate unnecessary processes and more quickly render decisions on critical management projects within federal forests.
• Twenty-year stewardship contracts will allow industry to invest and expand capacity so that there are additional markets for wood products in areas where mills are scarce. Without markets, options for active management are limited and forest health suffers.

• Limiting the number of alternatives under consideration in an environmental analysis streamlines the process by removing unnecessary steps and costly surveys, which in turn can help focus the work of a broad-based group of stakeholders.

Now, we ask that you stress the merit of these reforms to your colleagues so that this important legislation can be enacted with the passage of the 2018 omnibus appropriations. The nation’s forests – and the communities which depend upon them – will reap the benefit of your efforts.

Sincerely,

George Geissler
NASF President
Oklahoma State Forester