



The National Association of State Foresters' COVID-19 Stimulus Platform

Not only is the forestry sector foundational to rural economies, it is essential to the nation's economic recovery. State forestry agencies are critical links in the forestry sector supply chain and provide essential support to our nation's emergency response capacity for wildfires and other disasters, like the COVID-19 Pandemic. We urge Congress to take the following recommendations into consideration when assessing options for economic recovery.

Meet Immediate State Forestry Needs

(1) To continue federal program implementation under state budget shortfalls, (2) to retain current state forestry employees and hire new recruits, (3) to jump start rural economies through forestry work, (4) and to focus State and Private Forestry (S&PF) program dollars where they will provide the most support to the forestry sector: Provide an additional \$500 million (with spending flexibility) to state forestry agencies for S&PF program implementation.

We ask that Congress provide supplemental appropriations for S&PF programs or provide block grants directly to state forestry agencies. This additional funding, with the added flexibility of (1) spending authority for three to five years; (2) waived or reduced state match requirements for three to five years; and (3) reallocating funds from the Landscape Scale Restoration program to four S&PF base programs for the next two years, will give state forestry agencies the resources they need to create new jobs, strengthen the forest products supply chain, and improve forest health, resilience, and productivity nationwide.

To adequately support wildland fire activities amid COVID-19 constraints:

- Fund the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) and State Fire Assistance (SFA) programs at a level 20% above the current appropriations (\$16.4 million for SFA and \$3.6 million for VFA) to purchase personal protective equipment for state and local volunteer wildland firefighters;
- Provide funding for state purchase of equipment that supports wildland fire activities—e.g. dozers, aviation assets, small equipment needs, etc.—while waiving federal ownership up to a certain level; and
- Provide funding for states to secure Exclusive Use (EU) and Call When Needed (CWN) contracts with available Large Air Tankers (LATs), Very Large Air Tankers (VLATs), Single Engine Air Tankers (SEATs), and Type 3 Helicopters to maximize initial attack capacity.

Drive Economic Recovery Nationwide

To support the forestry supply chain and the 2.4 million jobs and \$281 billion in timber and manufacturing sales it generates annually:

- Create a loan program with no less than \$2.5 billion in funds for contractors who harvested or delivered wood to mills in the U.S. during 2019 (as proposed by the American Loggers Council);
- Extend a sustainable building tax credit to construction projects and the manufacturers of U.S. wood products used in these projects (as proposed by the Hardwood Federation);
- Increase government purchases of U.S. wood products, including structural and finished products, for federal building and transportation projects (as proposed by the Hardwood Federation);
- Provide a cash payment to primary forest product industry manufacturers at 25 cents per ton of wood purchased at their mill to incentivize job creation and support markets for active forest management; and
- Increase financial support for the USDA Foreign Agriculture Service's Market Access Program or Trade Missions Program to help forestry businesses, especially hardwood products producers, negatively impacted by both Chinese tariffs and COVID-19 to diversify their customer bases.

To expand active forest management on federal lands through GNA: Provide additional funding for states to hire temporary employees to conduct Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) work. Increasing the pace and scale of critical forest management work on federal lands improves overall forest health, supports cross-boundary projects and coordination, and provides job opportunities in rural communities. These hires would not supplant vacant Forest Service positions.

To shore up rural transportation systems: Prioritize increased investments in road and bridge infrastructure in rural areas where access to America's forests is at stake. Rural communities—as well as America's forest products and the outdoor recreation tourism industries—depend on local roads and bridges. The nation's counties build and manage 45% of all roads and 40% of all bridges, but struggle to maintain them. The Forest Service has 380,000 miles of roads and an \$8.4 billion maintenance and reconstruction backlog. These unmaintained rural roads funnel sedimentation to waterways, degrading water quality and aquatic/riparian habitats.

To support afforestation and reforestation: Direct federal funding to state forestry agency operated tree nurseries and seed orchards to enhance capacity and operations of these facilities to support reforestation efforts. Investing in these operations will ramp up production of trees and seedlings, ensuring a future supply to meet reforestation objectives. Additionally, a federal guarantee for a multi-year commitment to purchase tree seedlings from state and private tree seedling nurseries will spur production, support tree improvement systems and local jobs, encourage the use of new equipment and technology, drive collaborative tree planting projects in smaller communities, and help meet the U.S. Chapter's goals for the global Trillion Trees Initiative.

Include Legislative Opportunities in COVID-19 Stimulus

Support the Forest Recovery Act (H.R. 1444 / S. 1687) to help America's forest landowners recover from forest losses due to natural disasters. The Forest Recovery Act is not a subsidy or transfer of funds program. It simply allows landowners to deduct the fair market value of timber destroyed by natural disasters in accordance to the tax code. Amending the tax code to give landowners immediate relief and remain economically viable will have environmental and economic benefits for all Americans.

Support the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (H.R. 3742) to put Americans back to work expanding our recreational infrastructure, restoring our natural resources, and investing in on-the-ground projects nationwide. This legislation represents a smart, future-focused investment that will immediately create jobs, help restart the outdoor economy, and support key economic sectors such as agriculture, forestry, and ranching.

Support Reauthorization of Secure Rural Schools and Self Determination Act (SRS) to provide critical funding to approximately 700 counties and supports over 4,000 schools located in rural communities that border national forests across the country. Reauthorizing SRS will ensure that students receive essential education services and rural communities have the resources they need to conduct road maintenance and infrastructure projects, conservation projects, search and rescue missions, and fire prevention programs. Rural communities and their economies are the backbone of the forestry supply chain. Their viability is critical to economic recovery.

