

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS
Statement for the Record
U.S. House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Fiscal Year 2008 Appropriations Recommendations

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) supports sustainable forests managed for the public interest.¹ We are pleased to submit the following testimony on the proposed FY 2008 USDA Forest Service Budget for the programs that fund the State and Private Forestry programs. ***NASF recommends that the FY'08 budget for the State and Private Forestry programs of the USDA Forest Service be increased by \$230.9 million from the FY '07CR of \$351.7 million to \$582 million in FY'08.*** One-third of the nation's landscape is forested and 57 percent of these forests (290 million acres) are privately owned and over 7 percent are owned by state and local governments. These programs are directed at that ownership. Working collaboratively with federal, state, tribal and private forest landowners improves the effectiveness of forest conservation and management programs and provides substantial environmental, economic and social benefits to society.

Over 200 million acres of federal forests are at increased risk for catastrophic wildfire caused by the buildup of biomass fuel loads which pose a significant increased threat to adjacent private forestlands, air and water quality, and wildlife habitat. Insect epidemics and invasive plant species have now covered millions of acres of forests, which create additional risks to private forestlands, increase catastrophic wildfire risks, and if left unmanaged could virtually eliminate the carbon sequestration capacity of the U.S.²

Fragmentation and parcelization of private forest ownership increase the challenge of effectively addressing these threats to sustainable forest resource management. More importantly, adequate and necessary resources through the State and Private Forestry Programs need to be provided to focus on active management strategies to maximize the public benefits, such as air and water quality, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, timber and fiber, and human health and well being, of this critical natural resource.

While the President has proposed a 26 percent reduction in the State and Private Forestry Program from the 2007 CR budget level, the NASF endorses a 38 percent increase in these essential programs. For the State and Private Forestry programs within the Wildland Fire Management budget, the President has proposed reducing these programs by 14 percent from the '07 levels, and the NASF recommends a 59 percent budget increase to address the ever increasing risks from growing fuel loads and insect infestations. The President's proposal offsets a 10 year running average increase in wildland fire suppression costs of \$220 million by slashing other program areas.³ This budgeting requirement necessitates a fundamental reform in the budget rules and the resultant budget structure and priorities.

Efficiency gains in management can provide funds for some of the program enhancements discussed below. At the national office, regional offices, and fire management level there are

opportunities to improve productivity without jeopardizing program deliverables. The current effort to “Redesign” the State and Private Forestry Programs led by the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters represents a significant effort to achieve these opportunities.

State Fire Assistance (SFA) is the primary program that delivers federal funding to states to support local firefighting preparedness, capacity building, and fire mitigation for wildland fire management. This program aids in initial attack success and helps reduce overall federal fire costs. It’s effective. Ninety-four percent of wildfires are suppressed during the initial attack and another 4 percent are suppressed during extended initial attack. Funds are used to assist communities prepare Community Wildfire Protection Plans and SFA is the only federal program that targets the wildland-urban interface issues, which is a large component of the 10-year National Fire Plan. There are 11,000 communities adjacent to federal forestlands and another 45,000 communities at risk to wildfires. SFA has only helped a fraction of these at-risk communities and drastic cuts in this program will only increase their risk to catastrophic fires. Federal funds are also matched dollar-for-dollar from states and other sources, including businesses at the local level. While wildfire risks are increasing, public policy should not reduce the preparedness capacity to address these risks or reduce programs that focus on mitigating these risks.

NASF recommends funding SFA at \$50 million under State and Private Forestry and \$95 million under Wildland Fire Management. An exclusive focus on federal lands is an incomplete solution and will ultimately undermine success by not taking a landscape-scale approach to planning and implementation of hazardous fuels reduction projects.

Forest Stewardship is the program that provides technical, educational and related services to family forest landowners to help them better protect, maintain, restore and preserve forest lands. Funding has been relatively consistent for the past 9 years but significantly lags demand. To date, the program has assisted over 2.5 million landowners and fostered the development of 272,677 Stewardship Plans covering 31.2 million acres.

There are 290 million acres non-industrial private forest lands owned by 9.6 million private owners in the U.S. Stewardship Plans assist these landowners to manage their forests in a sustainable way which maximizes public benefits for air and water quality, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, timber, recreation, and open space. NASF recommends funding this program at \$45 million which is a \$3.1 million increase over the ‘07 budget level and \$25 million more than the President’s proposed ‘08 budget.

Forest Health: Cooperative Lands serves to minimize the spread of established invasive species and lessen the damage of native insects and diseases. Over 27 million acres of non-federal lands are at risk of insect and disease damage. There are now more than 400 non-native insects and 24 non-native pathogens permanently established in North American woodlands. With no specialized predators or resistant hosts to keep them under control, these pests can spread aggressively and raise havoc with our forests. Damaged, unhealthy forests increase the

corresponding risks for wildland fires. Dead or damaged trees don't sequester carbon. State and Private Forestry funding provides states with support for prevention, detection, and suppression of harmful insects and diseases. Funds from Wildland Fire Management are used primarily for forest insect and disease mitigation in high hazard areas. NASF recommends a total of \$66 million for this program, divided between S&PF (\$53 million) and WFM (\$13 million). This represents a \$9 million increase over the '07CR budget and \$17.9 million over the President's budget proposal.

Urban and Community Forestry provides technical assistance and cost-share grants to states, local governments, and non-profit organizations to enhance environmental services provided from urban trees (energy cooling and flood protection, for example) and the quality of life for citizens in urban and rural communities. Projects can include funds to plant and maintain urban forests, disease and insect mitigation, tree ordinance development, drought resistance studies, riparian restoration and many more. Demand for these programs exceeds the available funding. Cities and particularly towns do not have the ability to fund full time urban forestry expertise and rely on the state forestry agencies with federal funding to provide technical, education, and financial assistance. In Kentucky, for example, 16 percent of the state's residents are reached by this program. Urban forests account for over 11 percent of the total carbon sequestered in the U.S. NASF recommends that this program be funded at \$36 million, a \$5.9 million increase over the '07CR budget, and \$18.6 million more than the President's proposal.

Forest Inventory Analysis (FIA) is the ongoing census of America's forests. Using current ecosystem data to project how the forests will appear 10-15 years in the future, FIA reports on the status and trends in forest area using a variety of indicators over time. These data are critical to provide the metrics to assess the effectiveness of resource management programs and provide important information on current and emerging threats to this natural resource which is vital to human health. FIA funding is managed by the USFS Research and Development branch with additional funds provided by states which support state inventory crews and work with forest landowners to participate in these inventories. NASF recommends total funding of FIA at \$73.4 million and maintaining the State and Private Forestry component at \$5 million to ensure an all-lands approach to this program. The President's proposed budget is \$62.3 million.

The **Forest Legacy** program identifies and protects important private forestlands that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. Fragmentation of the ownership base is not only a significant management challenge for sustainable forest resource management, but this growing trend severely impacts eco-system regimes for wildlife, water quality, and air quality. This program promotes the use of conservation easements from willing landowners to sustain the integrity and traditional uses of private working forestlands that provide substantial public benefits. Until a robust eco-system benefits market trading system is in place, the Forest Legacy program provides a critical means to continue the production of public benefits absent an alternative compensation system. Currently 46 states and territories qualify for Forest Legacy funding and 5 other states are in the process of qualifying. In FY'07, 31 projects were submitted for federal funding of over \$61.5 million and their total project costs of almost \$220 million. Of those, 24 projects were selected with \$57.2 million funding made available. NASF supports fully

funding this program at \$75 million compared with the '07CR level of \$56.5 million. The President's proposal is \$29.3 million.

Volunteer Fire Assistance and the related Rural Fire Assistance (DOI's related program) is targeted at assisting rural communities with populations of 10,000 or less to establish new fire departments and to upgrade fire suppression capabilities of existing departments. As industrial forestlands have been sold or transferred to other owners, the fire fighting infrastructure supported by those industrial owners has disappeared but the need has not gone away. Rural communities apply for cost-share grants to aid them in purchasing firefighting equipment, training personnel, or supported related needs. Requests for funding every year exceed available resources. This program is one of the federal government's most cost effective programs. NASF proposes funding this program at \$35 million. The '07CR level is \$13.7 million and the President proposed an increase to \$17 million.

The **Watershed Forestry Assistance Program** seeks to maximize the benefits of sound forestry for the improvement of water quality in priority watersheds. Forested watersheds produce high quality water and active forest management can resolve a variety of environmental problems associated with agricultural and developed land uses. Riparian forests can be a cost effective solution to thermal impacts on aquatic wildlife, particularly when compared to capital intensive technology alternatives. NASF recommends funding this program at \$30 million.

Budget reform for wildfire suppression costs is critical. There is a need to meet this nation's wildland fire protection needs in a reliable, consistent, and cost effective manner without decimating other active forest management programs that address threat reductions and optimization of public benefits of forests. The rising costs of fire suppression exacerbate this conundrum.

Conclusion: NASF appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony to the Subcommittee regarding the FY 2008 budget.

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¹ NASF is an association that represents the State Foresters of the 50 states and the 9 directors of forestry in the U.S. territories, commonwealths, and freely associated Pacific Islands and the District of Columbia. ² Fearing the effects of forest fires and tree-destroying insect infestations, the Canadian federal government has decided against using Canada's forests in its calculations for totaling up Canada's greenhouse gas emissions. In fact forests could become a net source if projections for 2008-2012 are realized. In contrast, the U.S. takes a 13% reduction in its emissions due to sequestration with 93% of this sequestration from forests. From 1990 to 2004 the total sequestration in forests has declined by 14 percent. Source: EPA Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2004, 2-20-2007.

³ The Forest Service wildfire suppression budget over the last 16 years has increased from 13% of the total agency's budget to 45%, and it is predicted to increase.