

Expand Good Neighbor Authority to Allow State Foresters to Assist the USDA Forest Service



Photo courtesy WI DNR

ABOUT NASF

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is composed of the directors of state and territorial forestry agencies and the District of Columbia.

NASF represents state and territorial forester interests by influencing forest policy and leading efforts to optimize social, economic, and environmental benefits of trees and forests.

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Background

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) of the Farm Bill allows the USDA Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts to allow state forestry agencies to perform watershed restoration and forest management services such as fuels work, forest thinning or timber sale layout and administration on National Forest System (NFS) lands.

As of January 2017 the USDA Forest Service had entered into 56 Good Neighbor Agreements with 21 states.

Congress passed two laws expanding GNA including the FY 2014 Appropriations Act and the 2014 Farm Bill. Both have similar objectives albeit different authorities.

The Farm Bill Version's Limitations

- The Farm Bill version does not allow for road reconstruction or construction of any kind, even basic culvert replacements. As a result, State Foresters are limited in the number of forest management projects with which they can assist the USDA Forest Service. A change to the Farm Bill is possible as part of the next Farm Bill effort, but that would not happen for two to three years and even then the outcome is uncertain.

The Appropriations Act Version's Limitations

- The Appropriations Act version does allow for road reconstruction or construction, however this version has an expiration date of 2018. Most Forest Service forest management projects with a commercial component are five year contracts and hence often agency staff do not or cannot utilize this authority.

Solution

Make the Good Neighbor Authority work for all Americans by supporting short-term solution to amend the Appropriations Act version to allow for longer contract periods. For the long-term, Congress should permit road reconstruction or construction in GNA agreements as part of the next Farm Bill.