



September 12, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
U.S. Senate
SH-109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
U.S. Senate
SH-731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

We understand that the Senate Agriculture Committee has scheduled a markup of wild fire funding and forestry reform legislation on September 13. We want to thank the Committee for their leadership and persistence in advancing a resolution to wildfire funding challenges faced by the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior as well as providing forest management provisions which will help facilitate more active forest management. The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) again *urges the Committee to ensure that legislation is enacted this year* which addresses wildfire funding and forest management challenges.

NASF is composed of the directors of forestry agencies in the 50 states, eight territories and the District of Columbia. Collectively these member organizations have responsibility for forest and fire management on almost two-thirds of America's forests, or 500 million acres. Resolving fire funding challenges and enhancing active forest management, which will actually reduce fire funding challenges, are top priorities for the forestry community. We will address in general terms what we believe would best conserve and protect America's forests and all of us who depend upon them.

Addressing Fire Borrowing: In terms of fire transfers and borrowing, NASF much appreciates bill language which will curtail this late season practice. This practice has deleterious impacts on the agency's ability to develop partnerships and accomplish on the ground work as we have seen the agency cancel contracts with key partners, or send seasonal employees home in mid-summer who were engaged in important resource work. The agency continues to take these actions in order to pay the anticipated fire suppression bill for that season. Per language in this bill, that practice would end.

Continuing Concern for the Erosion of Non-Fire Suppression Programs: In recent years, the portion of the Forest Service's overall budget allocated to fire suppression has grown significantly. As more funding is allocated to fight fires, less is allocated to other areas of the Forest Service budget. Over the past two years there has been a 100 million dollar reduction, per year, in funding available for non-fire suppression programs, including critical fuels and forestry work. This work would actually minimize wildfire impacts. In addition there are a host of forestry and fire support programs critical to the management of the nation's state and private trees and forests which are being adversely affected by this budget trend. Fire suppression costs accounted for 16 percent of the Forest Service's total budget in fiscal year (FY) 1995, grew to over 50 percent in FY 2015 and are expected to continue to increase.

NASF urges the Committee to adopt a comprehensive solution that addresses fire transfers and halts the erosion of non-wildfire suppression funding due to increasing suppression costs. This is an urgent priority for the nation and must be resolved.

Addressing the Need for More Active Forest Management: NASF has developed a policy position paper which highlights our suggestions for improving Federal Forest Land Policy (link attached). Specifically, our approved NASF policy position does support environmentally responsible reforms in order to encourage more active forest management such as: streamlining the analysis process when there is collaboration of diverse interests, expanded use of categorical exclusions, increasing reforestation efforts after catastrophic wildfires through responsible salvage activity, and piloting arbitration.

State Forest Action Plans (FAP's) and Landscape Scale Restoration

We appreciate the opportunities we have had to visit with Committee staff regarding an expanded role of the States' Forest Action Plans as prepared by the State Foresters. Collectively these fifty-nine plans (fifty states, eight territories and the District of Columbia) are the plans for America's forests. Specifically we would ask for changes to the State and Private Forestry Landscape –Scale Restoration Program whereby the State Forest Action Plans (FAPs) would not just be one of several, but the key resource in prioritizing projects as we have discussed with your staff. Also, in selecting designated landscapes for the National Forest Accelerated Landscape Restoration Pilot Program, which would likely include cross-boundary work, we would ask that FAP's also help guide those decisions. (See: forestactionplans.org) Lastly, as we have discussed with staff, we would ask the Committee to consider if there are other opportunities to encourage and allow for expanding the use of authorities to accomplish more cross-boundary forest management.

Support for Small Tracts Act Amendment

As noted in earlier correspondence on this topic, we appreciate your support for legislation which will provide for more efficient land management.

Again we much appreciate the Committee's persistence and leadership in advancing a resolution to these challenges and we urge the Senate to work to pass legislation this year. We look forward to working with the Committee as legislation continues to move forward.

Sincerely,



Paul DeLong

President, National Association of State Foresters
State Forester of Wisconsin

Link to NASF Federal Forest Land Policy: <http://www.stateforesters.org/sites/default/files/issues-and-policies-document-attachments/NASF%20Federal%20Lands%20Policy%20Position%20Final.pdf>

cc: All Members, Senate Agriculture Committee,

Chairman and Ranking Member, Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee

Executive Director
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