

**Written Public Testimony of Robert Farris
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On Behalf of the National Association of State Foresters**

**Submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**

April 9, 2013

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies regarding our Fiscal Year (FY) 2014 appropriations recommendations. Our priorities center on appropriations for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs. We recommend that FY 2014 appropriations for S&PF be held at \$253 million, representing funding levels enacted in FY 2012.

State Foresters deliver technical and financial assistance, along with forest health, water and wildfire protection for more than two-thirds of the nation's forests. The Forest Service S&PF mission area provides vital support for delivering these services alongside other socioeconomic and environmental health benefits in both rural and urban areas. The comprehensive process for delivering such services is articulated in each of the state Forest Action Plans as authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill. S&PF programs provide a significant return on the federal investment by leveraging the boots-on-the-ground and financial resources of state agencies to deliver assistance to forest landowners, tribes and communities. As state and federal governments face extremely tight fiscal conditions, State Foresters, in partnership with the S&PF mission area of the Forest Service, are best positioned to maximize the effectiveness of the limited resources available to respond to priority forest issues and focus efforts in those areas where they are needed most.

RESPONDING TO PRIORITY FOREST ISSUES, TRENDS AND THREATS

Management activities are underway to implement the state Forest Action Plans and respond to the following trends, issues and priorities:

Forest Pests and Invasive Plants. Among the greatest threats identified in the Forest Action Plans are exotic forest pests and invasive species. The growing number of damaging pests is often a result of the introduction and spread by way of wooden shipping materials, movement of firewood and through various types of recreation. These pests have the potential to displace native trees, shrubs and other vegetation types in forests. The Forest Service estimates that hundreds of native and nonnative insects and diseases damage the nation's forests each year. In 2009, approximately 12 million acres suffered mortality from insects and diseases.¹ These losses impact the availability of clean and abundant water, wildlife habitat, clean air and other environmental services. Further, extensive areas of high insect or disease mortality can set the stage for large-scale, catastrophic wildfire.

In response, the Cooperative Forest Health Management program provides technical and financial assistance to states and territories to maintain healthy, productive forest ecosystems on non-federal forest lands. Funding for the Program supports activities related to prevention,

¹ Man, Gary. 2010. Major Forest Insect and Disease Conditions in the United States: 2009 Update. Last accessed on March, 7, 2012 at: http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/publications/ConditionsReport_09_final.pdf

suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants as well as conducting forest health monitoring through pest surveys. The Program helped combat native and invasive pests on over 615,000 acres of non-federal forest lands in 2012.

NASF supports the consolidation of the Forest Health Program under State and Private Forestry and urges funding the Forest Health—Cooperative Lands Program at no less than the FY 2012 enacted level of \$48 million. Any further cuts to this program beyond those made in FY 2012 will necessitate deeper reductions in support for communities already facing outbreaks and expose more of the nation’s forests and trees to the devastating and costly effects of exotic and invasive pests and pathogens.

Fuel Loads and Wildland Fire. More people in fire-prone landscapes, high fuel loads, drought and unhealthy landscapes are among the factors that have led State Foresters to identify wildland fire as a significant priority issue in their Forest Action Plans. These factors have created a wildland fire situation that has become increasingly expensive and complex and, in many cases, threatens human life and property. In 2012, over 67,774 wildland fires burned more than 9.3 million acres.² In the wake of these larger fires, over 4,200 structures were destroyed, including over 2,200 residences.³ Of the 72,400 communities across the country currently at risk of wildland fire, only 14,775 (i.e. 20%) are prepared for wildland fire.⁴

State Fire Assistance (SFA) is the fundamental federal mechanism that assists states and local fire departments in developing preparedness and response capabilities for wildland fire management on non-federal lands. This program helps with training and equipping first responders who can quickly and efficiently respond to wildland fires. By directing resources to actions that help reduce the number of large wildland fires—including prevention education, preparedness activities and fuels mitigation—the SFA program directly addresses concerns over rising wildland fire suppression costs, while also reducing wildland fire risks. In FY 2012, SFA directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on nearly 133,514 acres (with another 452,000 acres treated with leveraged funding) and provided assistance to 16,577 communities as they prepare for (and mitigate the risk of) wildland fire. ***NASF supports funding for the State Fire Assistance program at no less than FY12 enacted levels of \$86 million. We support consolidation of SFA into one line item with the understanding and expectation that adjustments in the grant process are not required.***

The Forest Service did not have sufficient funding for suppression purposes for the entire Fiscal Year 2012, and implemented a strategy to transfer over \$400 million from non-fire programs to cover shortfalls. We wish to thank you for including reimbursement to the USDA Forest Service for the \$400 million transferred in FY12 as part of last fall’s continuing resolution. Further, we greatly appreciate the subcommittee’s attempt to provide funding above the 10 year average for suppression efforts as part of HR 933. Estimates for the costs of suppression for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013 anticipate that suppression costs will significantly exceed the 10 year average. ***We urge you to avoid transfers in FY 14 by providing fire suppression funding that is no less than the 10 year average with additional funds to rebuild and maintain reserves in the FLAME Account.***

² National Interagency Fire Center, Historical Wildland Fire Summaries, pg. 9. Last accessed April 3, 2013 at http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/2012_statsum/fires_acres.pdf

³ National Interagency Coordination Center.

⁴ National Association of State Foresters, Communities at Risk Report FY2012.

Working Forest Landscapes. Working forest landscapes are a key part of the rural landscape and provide an estimated 900,000 jobs, in addition to clean water, wood products and other essential services to millions of Americans. For instance, 80 percent of renewable biomass energy comes from wood, 53 percent of all freshwater in the U.S. originates on forest land and more than \$200 billion in sales of consumer products and services are provided through the nation's forests each year.⁵

Private forests make up two-thirds of all the forestland in the United States and support an average of eight jobs per 1,000 acres.⁶ The ability of working forests to continue providing jobs, renewable energy, clean and abundant water and other important services is in jeopardy as private forests are lost to development. The Forest Service estimates that 57 million acres of private forests in the U.S. are at risk of conversion to urban development over the next two decades. The Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Legacy Program and other programs within USDA are key tools identified in the Forest Action Plans to keep working forests intact.

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) is the most extensive family forest-owner assistance program in the country. Planning assistance is delivered in cooperation with state forestry agencies primarily through the development of Forest Stewardship Plans. In FY 2012, nationwide, more than 21 million acres of private forest lands were managed according to Forest Stewardship Plans. The program provides information to private landowners to help them manage their land for wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber production, and many other purposes. The technical assistance provided through the FSP is a gateway to other effective USDA, state, and private sector programs designed to help keep working forests intact. For instance, the FSP enables landowners to participate in USDA programs including the Forest Legacy Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program. ***NASF recommends funding the Forest Stewardship Program in FY14 at no less than the FY12 level of \$29 million.***

Urban and Community Forest Management Challenges. Urban forests provide environmental, social and economic benefits to the more than 84% of Americans who live in metropolitan areas. Forest Action Plans identified a number of benefits associated with urban forests including energy savings, improved air quality, neighborhood stability, aesthetic values, reduced noise and improved quality of life for communities across the country. At the same time, the plans reported a number of threats to urban and community forests including fire in the wildland urban interface (WUI), urbanization and development, invasive plants and insects, diseases and others.

Since its expansion under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1990 (CFAA), the Forest Service's Urban & Community Forestry (U&CF) program has provided technical and financial assistance to promote stewardship of urban forests in communities of all sizes across the country. The program is delivered in close partnership with State Foresters and leverages existing local efforts that have helped thousands of communities and towns manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. This "green infrastructure" is a cornerstone for neighborhood stability and revitalization and the numerous contributions this program provides the urban environment should not be underestimated. In FY 2012, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,499 communities in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories and affiliated Pacific Island nations. The program reached over 196

⁵ Society of American Foresters. *The State of America's Forests*. 2007.

⁶ Forest2Market. *The Economic Impact of Privately-Owned Forests*. 2009.

million Americans (i.e., over 60% of the U.S. population) in FY12. ***NASF supports a FY14 appropriation at no less than FY12 levels (i.e. \$31 million) for the U&CF Program.***

IMPORTANCE OF FOREST INVENTORY DATA IN MONITORING FOREST ISSUES

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program, managed by Forest Service Research, is the nation's only comprehensive forest inventory system for assessing the health and sustainability of the nation's forests across all ownerships.⁷ FIA provides essential data related to forest species composition, forest growth rates, and forest health data and delivers baseline inventory estimates used in state Forest Action Plans. The Program provides unbiased information that serves as the basis for monitoring trends in wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, insect and disease threats, predicting spread of invasive species and for responding to priorities identified in the Forest Action Plans.

We greatly appreciated the Subcommittee's willingness to fund FIA at \$72M in FY '13 even though funding at that level was never enacted. ***We urge Congress to support the FIA program in FY 2014 at \$73 million*** and provide direction to the Forest Service to look for the most efficient way(s) to deliver the program including contracting with partners, most notably state forestry agencies, who can accomplish necessary field work at lower cost.

LANDSCAPE SCALE RESTORATION AND RESPONSE TO FY 2012 MANAGER'S STATEMENT

Members of NASF support competitively allocating a percentage of CFAA funds to encourage innovative *projects* to address national, regional and state-specific priorities consistent with each state's Forest Action Plan. However, a competitive process is not the most effective means of identifying *program* investments that can provide the greatest return on investment. Further, the allocation of funds to states by formula for each State and Private Forestry program cannot always be expected to result in the mix of funding that best serves any one state's ability to maximize implementation of their Forest Action Plans. In response to direction included in the FY12 conference report, NASF continues to work with the Forest Service to develop a process allowing state foresters flexibility to reallocate a percentage of their allocations for CFAA programs to address priorities identified in their Forest Action Plans.

IMPACTS OF SEQUESTRATION ON STATE AND PRIVATE FORESTRY PROGRAMS

Through the CFAA, State Foresters deliver technical and financial assistance, along with forest health, water and wildfire protection for more than two-thirds of the nation's forests. The comprehensive process for delivering such services is articulated in each of the state Forest Action Plans. The Forest Service State and Private Forestry (S&PF) mission area provides vital support for delivering these services and relies, in large part, on state forestry agencies to deliver the on-the-ground accomplishments associated with S&PF programs.

The sequestration order that went into effect on March 1st triggered a 5% reduction in non-exempt nondefense discretionary funding during the current fiscal year. The Office of Management and Budget reports that a 5 percent reduction to State and Private Forestry will result in a \$13 million sequester amount. We expect the Forest Service will be mindful of the relationship with state foresters established through the CFAA when developing and implementing their sequestration plans. NASF does not support reductions in state allocations for S&PF programs that go beyond 5 percent. We request the support from the Subcommittee to ensure the agency's plans minimize the impact of the sequester on program delivery and outcomes which are realized directly through the work of state forestry agencies.

⁷ The program has not yet been fully implemented in all states including Interior Alaska