

**Written Public Testimony of Jim Karels**  
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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 3, 2014

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) 2015 appropriations recommendations. Our priorities focus primarily on appropriations for the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs.

State foresters deliver technical and financial assistance, along with forest health, water and wildfire protection for more than two-thirds of the nation's 751 million acres of 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 these services is articulated in each State Forest Action Plan, authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill and continued in the recently passed Agriculture Act of 2014. 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 we continue to face difficult financial challenges, state foresters, in partnership with the S&PF mission area of the Forest Service, are best positioned to maximize the effectiveness of the resources available to respond to priority forest issues and focus efforts in those areas where they are needed most.

Your support of the following programs is critical to helping states address the many and varied challenges outlined in State Forest Action Plans.

**Wildland Fire and Forest Fuels**

**Wildland Fire Funding:** The Forest Service and Department of the Interior were forced to transfer a combined \$636 million in FY 2013 to fund fire suppression activities. We greatly appreciate your support in reimbursing the Forest Service and Department of the Interior these transferred amounts through the continuing resolution last fall. Unfortunately, early estimates for the cost of wildland fire suppression in FY 2014 indicate that costs could once again exceed the 10-year average.

In the span of only two years – from FY 2012 to 2013 – the agencies were forced to transfer more than \$1 billion, funds that Congress had appropriated to other priority programs, to fund wildland fire suppression. In order to avoid these disruptive transfers in the future, we urge you to include language mirroring the bi-partisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, introduced in the House and Senate, in the FY 2015 Interior Appropriations bill. This important change to fire funding at the federal level is needed to enable the Forest Service to deliver on its own land management objectives and to deliver critical Research and State & Private Forestry Programs to the nation's non-federal forests without any further disruption from fire transfers.

**State Fire Assistance:** More people living in fire-prone landscapes, high fuel loads, drought and unhealthy landscapes are among the factors that 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, complex, and, in many cases, threatens human life and property. In 2013, more than 47,500 wildland fires burned over 4.3 million acres.<sup>1</sup> In the wake of these larger fires, more than 2,135 structures were destroyed, including at least 1090 residences.<sup>2</sup> Of the 72,681 communities across the country currently at risk of wildland fire, only 12,434 (17.5%) are prepared for wildland fire.<sup>3</sup>

State Fire Assistance (SFA) is the fundamental federal mechanism that assists states and local fire departments to respond to wildland fires and conduct management activities to mitigate fire risk on non-federal lands. Further, SFA helps train and equip local first responders who are often the first resources to arrive at a wildland fire incident and who play a crucial role in keeping fires and their costs small. 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 risk to communities. In FY 2013, SFA directly funded hazardous fuel treatments on nearly 130,000 acres (with another 119,120 acres treated with leveraged funding) and provided assistance to over 23,600 communities as they prepare for and mitigate the risk of wildland fire. *NASF supports funding the State Fire Assistance program at \$86 million in FY 2015.*

### **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 2010, approximately 6.4 million acres suffered mortality from insects and diseases<sup>4</sup> and there is an estimated 81.3 million acres at risk from insects and disease over the next 15 years.<sup>5</sup> 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, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants as well as conducting forest health monitoring through pest surveys. The Forest Health program helps protect communities already facing outbreaks and helps prevent exposure of more of the nation's forests and trees to the devastating and costly effects of exotic and invasive pests and pathogens. *NASF supports funding the Forest Health—Cooperative Lands Program at \$48 million in FY 2015.*

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<sup>1</sup> National Interagency Fire Center, Historical Wildland Fire Summaries, pg. 9. Last accessed March 3, 2014 at [http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/2013\\_Statsumm/intro\\_summary13.pdf](http://www.predictiveservices.nifc.gov/intelligence/2013_Statsumm/intro_summary13.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> National Interagency Coordination Center.

<sup>3</sup> National Association of State Foresters, Communities at Risk Report FY2013.

<sup>4</sup> Man, Gary. 2011. Major Forest Insect and Disease Conditions in the United States: 2010 Update. Last accessed on March, 5, 2014 at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/publications/ConditionsReport\\_2011.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/publications/ConditionsReport_2011.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Tkacz, Bory, et al. 2014. NIDRM 2012 Report Files: Executive Summary. Last accessed on March, 5, 2014 at: [http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/technology/pdfs/2012\\_RiskMap\\_Exec\\_summary.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/foresthealth/technology/pdfs/2012_RiskMap_Exec_summary.pdf)

## **Working Forest Landscapes – Forest Stewardship Program**

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.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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. Management assistance is delivered in cooperation with state forestry agencies through technical assistance services and the development and implementation of Forest Stewardship Plans. In FY 2013, nationwide, more than 20 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 supports funding the Forest Stewardship Program at \$29 million in FY 2015.*

## **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 and 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 2013, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,292 communities in all 50 states, the District

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<sup>6</sup> Society of American Foresters. *The State of America's Forests*. 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Forest2Market. *The Economic Impact of Privately-Owned Forests*. 2009.

of Columbia, U.S. territories and affiliated Pacific Island nations. The program reached over 198 million Americans (i.e., over 60% of the U.S. population) in FY12. ***NASF supports funding the Urban and Community Forestry program at \$31 million in FY 2015.***

### **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.<sup>8</sup> 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 and by many others to understand forest trends and support investment in forest products facilities that provide jobs and needed products to society. 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.

The Farm Bill directed the Forest Service to revise the FIA strategic plan, and State Foresters are actively engaged with the Agency as they consider a new strategic plan for this crucial program. This program has wide bipartisan support and ***NASF supports funding the Forest Inventory and Analysis program at \$72 million in FY 2015.***

### **Landscape Scale Restoration**

We appreciate the support of the Subcommittee for State Forest Action Plans demonstrated through the establishment of the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) budget line item in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014. State foresters look forward to working with members of the Subcommittee and the Forest Service to make sure that, through LSR, we prioritize funds and resources to maximize return on investments to conserve, protect, and enhance our nation's forests. The LSR line item codifies the competitive allocation of Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act (CFAA) funds which began under direction from the 2008 Farm Bill – but state foresters believe that LSR can and should do more.

In the FY 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act Conference Report, the Subcommittee directed the Forest Service to develop a process allowing state foresters flexibility, with appropriate accountability, to reallocate a percentage of authorizations for CFAA programs to address state priorities consistent with State Forest Action Plans. NASF has worked closely with the Forest Service to explore how states could utilize funding flexibility to meet their own unique and changing needs; however issues around the need to request reprogramming of funds has been a barrier to implementing funding flexibility. State foresters believe that LSR provides a perfect opportunity to demonstrate the value in providing states the flexibility to meet these unique needs through the allocation of their CFAA funds. Such a model would include continued funding for the competitive allocation of CFAA funds with the addition of an allocation to states to further implementation of each State Forest Action Plan.

***NASF supports funding the Landscape Scale Restoration program at \$23.5 million in FY 2015 and would like to work with the Subcommittee to direct that a portion of LSR funds be made available to state forestry agencies, based on overall percentage of CFAA funds received, to further implement their State Forest Action Plan.***

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<sup>8</sup> The program has not yet been fully implemented in all states including Interior Alaska