



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS

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**Written Testimony of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF)  
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Submitted to the House Natural Resource Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 7951, *Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act*  
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The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is pleased to provide written testimony to the House Natural Resource Subcommittee on Federal Lands for this important hearing on H.R. 7951, *Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act*. Thank you, Chairman Tiffany and Ranking Member Neguse for holding this hearing today and for the opportunity to testify. I would also like to thank Representatives Valadao and Panetta for their leadership on this important legislation.

Established in 1920, the National Association of State Foresters is a non-profit organization composed of the directors of forestry agencies in the 50 states, five U.S. territories, three nations in compacts of free association with the U.S., and the District of Columbia. State Foresters provide technical assistance to private landowners and directly manage 76 million acres of state-owned forestland that supply critical timber for domestic uses. In addition, State Foresters and their agencies work to improve the health, resilience, and productivity of federal lands through partnerships such as Shared Stewardship Agreements and authorities such as Good Neighbor Authority and cross-boundary hazardous fuel reduction projects.

I have the pleasure of serving as the Montana State Forester and the Forestry and Trust Land Division Administrator at the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC). My role is as wide ranging and diverse as the State I represent. The DNRC has broad natural resource management jurisdiction. Under my purview, we do everything from managing roughly 5.2 million surface acres of state trust lands that generate revenue benefitting Montana's public education system, to being responsible for wildland fire protection of 60 million acres of state, private, and federal lands, to coordinating with partners to better manage our forested lands no matter the ownership. Like other western states, Montana faces unique challenges in terms of the extent of our forest health crisis. Thanks to the leadership of Governor Greg Gianforte, the DNRC has been invested in expanding its utilization of the Good Neighbor Authority while also bringing innovative and bold ideas to increase the pace and scale of forest management for the benefit of Montanans.

### ***States and Good Neighbor Authority***

Good Neighbor Authority (or "GNA") has been proven time and again as an effective tool for states and the U.S. Forest Service (or "Forest Service") to increase the pace and scale of improvements to forests and watersheds, reducing wildfire risks, supporting cross-boundary projects and coordination, and providing job opportunities for rural communities. GNA has been utilized by over two-thirds of the nation's state forestry agencies since its enactment in the 2014 Farm Bill. The Great Lakes states played an integral role in establishing the first GNA

agreements for timber management soon thereafter, with federal timber harvests and associated restoration projects performed under GNA now making up a significant proportion of forest management activities on several National Forests in the region. GNA has since grown in other parts of the country as well. As of late 2025, 14 state forestry agencies in the western United States reported over 180 active agreements with the Forest Service and 14 states reporting 18 active agreements with the Bureau of Land Management. Cumulatively, work completed under these and past agreements has led to over 200,000 acres of forest health and fuels reduction treatments, including 340 timber sales across almost 122,000 acres. These timber sales have generated over 870 million board feet of timber and a combined net value in excess of \$89 million.

As of December 2025, Montana has sold 69 timber sales and permits across 26,200 acres, harvesting over 169 million board feet for a value of \$23.7 million in revenue. Montana has invested revenue and other funding in over 140 restoration projects. In total, we have treated over 50,000 acres. In addition to vegetation management, the GNA program has completed 56 road and infrastructure projects. These include drainage improvements to reduce sediment delivery and culvert replacements to address fish connectivity. Through collaborative work, the DNRC is continuing to expand complimentary fuels reduction projects across ownerships.

Recognizing just how impactful GNA has been, the State of Montana approached the U.S. Forest Service in the spring of 2025 with the idea of an agreement to elevate its utilization on a landscape scale and to ensure long term program viability. In June 2025, Governor Gianforte and Forest Service Chief Tom Schultz signed a landmark twenty-year Shared Stewardship Agreement between Montana and the Forest Service for coordinated, cross-boundary forest management to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health, and support Montana's wood products industry. Our Shared Stewardship Agreement leverages federal authorities, including the EXPLORE Act and Good Neighbor Authority, to streamline project delivery and reduce regulatory delays. One of the most critical components was the commitment to jointly identify and implement large-scale forest management projects, with an initial focus on a landscape of at least 200,000 acres in northwest Montana. Further, under the agreement, DNRC and the Forest Service committed to work together to accomplish landscape-scale restoration projects at an increased pace and scale. Projects prioritize active forest management to safeguard Montana communities and infrastructure and improve the health of our forests. The agreement also establishes aggressive goals and requires regular public reporting on progress.

The DNRC then set off to collaboratively identify a landscape in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service. On March 6, 2026, Governor Gianforte and Chief Schultz announced the selection of not one, but two priority landscapes in Montana for forest management project implementation. The first two landscapes selected include approximately 213,910 acres across the Flathead and Kootenai National Forests and 200,000 acres within the Bitterroot National Forest. These areas were selected based on wildfire risk to nearby communities and infrastructure, opportunities for coordinated planning, and readiness for implementation.

On behalf of the State of Montana, we are proud to be leading the nation in this collaborative and impactful work. It is only the beginning of our continued commitment to actively manage our forests to reduce wildfire risk, improve forest health and resilience, and support sustainable

timber production. In turn, we see better outcomes for wildlife, protect watersheds and sustain our water supply, improve recreational access, and protect communities.

### ***H.R. 7951, Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act***

Historically, the Forest Service has allowed Good Neighbor Authority agreements for a 10-year term. However, with renewed Shared Stewardship Agreements – and cooperative management goals extending past a relatively short 10-year window – the Forest Service has since moved forward with a 20-year GNA agreement for Montana. State Foresters applaud the Forest Service for its steadfast commitment and nimbleness to unlock this opportunity, and we would like certainty for other states to access long-term agreements.

While there is no one-size-fits-all approach for a state’s ideal length of time for cooperative forest management, enshrining in statute the ability for states – if they so choose – to engage in terms over 10 years is critical. While GNA is decreasing project timelines on federal lands, forest management and shared stewardship is a landscape-scale, long-term commitment. Simply put, 10 years is often not long enough to meet the desired goals across the landscape. Factors for this include the nature of the project timelines, National Environmental Policy Act (or “NEPA”) permitting, bidding out contractors, hiring staff, obtaining proper permits and signatures, logging capacity, and other activities.

A good example of the need for longer term agreements in Montana can be highlighted by looking at a project we have called Highway 83 on the Lolo National Forest in Western Montana. The State of Montana brought capacity to the Forest Service through GNA to implement this project in an expedited fashion. GNA was the mechanism that helped the Forest Service move quickly from decision to implementation by initiating timber sale preparation immediately after the decision. The decision will result in approximately 8,450 acres of forest management, with commercial treatments, where generated revenue will be reinvested into future vegetation management efforts.

The ability for states to expand Forest Service NEPA efforts through GNA over longer periods of time is advantageous to landscape level treatment due to ability to combine planning efforts and approaches to increase efficiency and reduce redundancy. This in turn allows investments and revenue generation to perpetuate efforts on a landscape scale. A typical timeline for these projects starts with 2 to 3 years of planning and field reconnaissance, leading to 1 to 2 years of NEPA, followed by project implementation. In the case of timber sale contracts, work on-the-ground is ongoing for 3 to 5 years. Following the sale, contracts represent another 3 to 7 years’ worth of post-harvest work such as slash treatment, prescribed fire, and reforestation work including site preparation, burning, and planting. Often, total project timelines are 9 to 17-year windows. When you also consider the other restoration work that can be planned and completed using leftover revenues from the timber sales, this overlapping timeline gets even longer. We simply must have long-term assurances for staffing, budgeting, and planning this critical work.

Further, longer-term agreements provide more clarity and a roadmap for State Foresters to make durable, fiscally responsible budgeting and staffing decisions based on shared priorities of the state and federal agencies.

It is our hope as well through the consideration passage of the *Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act* that states can make greater strides with the Bureau of Land Management (or “BLM”) and other Department of the Interior agencies in the implementation of their respective GNA programs. In contrast to the Forest Service’s use of GNA as a longer-term tool of cross boundary work and reinvestment, BLM’s current practice of 3- to 5-year agreements has been challenging for States. State Foresters as well as the State of Montana have been working with BLM for several years to find a path forward and have made suggestions for increased efficiencies and ways to lengthen our joint commitment to this work. H.R. 7951 would provide helpful direction to facilitate those efforts. State Foresters are happy to discuss the opportunities that exist further with the Subcommittee.

Finally, placing a 20-year agreement term length in statute provides certainty and stability through national election cycles that result in changes both congressionally and across presidential administrations. Forest management requires a long-term commitment, and success is dependent on sustained work and policies that can last through these shifts.

### ***Continued Opportunities for Good Neighbor Authority***

NASF applauds the House Natural Resources Committee’s work to date to improve GNA, including passing the Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences (EXPLORE) Act, which enabled all GNA partners to perform restoration on all lands approved under the project’s Good Neighbor Agreement, regardless of federal boundaries. We also recognize the Committee’s work in H.R. 471, the *Fix Our Forests Act*, to officially bring in conservation districts and other special districts as GNA partners and ensure the sunset on revenue retention authority is further extended to further hedge against another lapse (as occurred in late 2023 and early 2024).

For states, the ability for GNA meet the current needs on federal lands is dependent on four critical levers: (1) sustained funding for the Forest Service’s State, Private, and Tribal Forestry programs, (2) integrated state and federal planning for activities, treatments, and long-term goals, (3) dedicated and predictable funding for state GNA projects, and (4) state discretion and operational autonomy under GNA to act effectively on needed active forest management activities. In particular, the role of dedicated and predictable funding for states to perform GNA cannot be understated, especially as not all states and federal lands have robust timber markets or marketable timber that can sustain a state GNA program.

In addition, you have heard many references to certainty and stability being core tenants for successful GNA programs and critical collaboration between states and federal land managers. While the *Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act* addresses the extended timeline of shared forest management goals and accomplishments, we cannot forget about the necessary programmatic mechanics that states’ GNA programs depend on. Under current law, the authority for states and other eligible partners to retain and reinvest revenue from GNA projects will sunset on October 1, 2028. This revenue is critical for state activities including sustaining and growing necessary on-the-ground capacity to get the work done. Just as we are recognizing 20-year management goals, it is just as important to allow the ability for states to plan how they will

reach those 20-year goals. We look forward to further conversations with the Subcommittee to repeal the sunset on revenue retention authority, especially now that GNA has evolved beyond the pilot program started 25 years ago, and states have a decade-long track record of responsibly managing and using timber sale revenue.

### ***Conclusion***

On behalf of NASF and the State of Montana, thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee today and provide testimony. We appreciate the ongoing work of this Subcommittee to provide solutions to increase the pace and scale of active forest management on federal lands. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee on H.R. 7951, *Long-Term Good Neighbor Authority Act* and any future legislative efforts to ensure GNA can continue to be a consistent and reliable tool for states, communities, and our nation's forests. I am happy to take any questions.