

June 30, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Committee on
Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts:

Our organizations are writing to you today on behalf of our millions of members who are dedicated to enhancing fish and wildlife conservation on our nation's public and private forest lands and watersheds and to securing the future of our hunting and angling heritage. We support S. 3085, *the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016*, which addresses wildfire suppression funding and forest management enhancements. Good proactive forest management coupled with a fire-fighting funding fix is our shared goal. We urge the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee to find a bipartisan path forward on this legislation to advance forest management enhancements and a permanent fix to wildfire suppression funding.

We support provisions in the bill that fix the problem of account transfers (out of important recreation, wildlife and forest project accounts) when wildfire suppression costs exceed the appropriated amounts for the Forest Service and BLM. We respectfully request that you consider adding a continuing ceiling set at last year's wildfire suppression 10-year average, and above which the agencies may access disaster funding, so that the Forest Service's and Department of the Interior's overall funding outlooks do not see any further shift in allocation of its budget towards wildfire suppression funding. The decline in staff resources and budget authority for other activities has contributed to the challenges of overstocked forests in all parts of the country, which is also reflected in certain types of wildlife habitat decline.

Specific to the bill, we find much favor with Sec. 603 Pilot Arbitration Program as a way to resolve disputes around forest management projects. Along with the Forest Service, we support the use of alternative dispute resolution such as arbitration on a pilot basis to reduce the threat of litigation and provide greater efficiencies and incentives for collaborative forest management activities. A pilot effort will allow appropriate evaluation and consideration of this alternative approach to expediting the delivery of on the ground forest conservation.

We likewise find much favor with the bill's provision on landscape scale restoration projects. Sec. 604. National Forest System Accelerated Landscape Restoration Pilot Program will promote large scale landscape forest management projects on federal land which are necessary to maintain healthy, resilient forests and improve wildlife habitat.

We have concerns with Section 502 "Management of Indian forest land authorized to include related National Forest system land and public land," which fails to recognize the authority of the state fish and wildlife agencies to manage fish and wildlife on Federal forest land designated as Tribal forest land. We are committed to working closely with your staff to resolve this so that the authorities of all three sovereign governments are appropriately acknowledged and respected.

Thank you for your continued leadership. We look forward to working with you and other Senate leaders on these issues to pass meaningful legislation that gets signed into law this year.

Sincerely,

American Fisheries Society
American Sportfishing Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
Catch A Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl Foundation
Houston Safari Club
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Wild Turkey Federation
Orion-The Hunter's Institute
Phycological Society of America
Public Lands Foundation
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
The Wildlife Society
Tread Lightly!
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Senate Russell Building
Washington, DC 20510

July 14, 2016

Dear Chairman Roberts:

As entities responsible for delivering sustainable water supply and renewable hydropower for millions of citizens throughout the Western U.S., we are writing in support of the “S. 3085, the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016.” This legislation aims to address “fire borrowing” and promote the active management of our nation’s forests. Recognizing and addressing both of these problems is of critical importance to the water supply community. Given the pressing threat of wildfire, we ask that you work with your Senate colleagues to act quickly on this legislation and other legislative proposals before the Senate.

Entering the 2016 wildfire season, where over 2 million acres have burned already, we are extremely concerned with the continued exponential decline in the health of national forests in the Western United States. The current and persistent drought has exacerbated the lack of active forest management. Overgrown forests, weakened from the drought, are more susceptible to disease, infestation, and ultimately catastrophic fires. Proactive forest management to decrease the volatile fuel load that exists in Western forests will reduce the devastating impacts of catastrophic wildfires while protecting municipal and agricultural water supply, hydropower production, and environmental health.

Catastrophic wildfires cause serious detrimental effects to the watersheds that Western communities depend upon. In 2015, wildfires burned over 10.1 million acres across the United States. According to the California Tree Mortality Task Force, over 29 million trees died in the Sierra Nevada range in 2015. Aerial surveys indicate parts of the Sierra Foothills between the elevation of 2,000 to 6,000 feet have suffered over 50 percent tree mortality. Overgrown forests lack the resiliency to combat the stress of a drought resulting in high tree mortality rates. In Washington State, the 2015 wildfire season was the most severe in modern history, burning more than 1 million acres, tragically claiming lives and homes, and damaging watersheds. Following recent high severity wildfires along Colorado’s Front Range, sediment production and transport is up 200 times greater than for areas burned at low-severity. In Arizona, tree densities are up to 20 times greater than what is normal for Southwestern ponderosa pine forests. The West is not alone in facing these threats. The Southwest and Southern states, as well as Alaska and Hawaii, will have above-normal significant wildland fire potential. (Nat. Interagency Fire Center 6/1/16). Therefore, we greatly appreciate your attention to this problem.

We support language that would help end the untenable practice of fire borrowing. Eliminating fire-borrowing practices will allow money to return to the critical projects that improve forest health, including both forest restoration and fire prevention projects. These types of projects reduce the exorbitant costs associated with catastrophic wildfire and allow fire suppression tactics to be proactive instead of the reactive nature of our current wildfire fighting strategy.

We also support provisions that reduce the compliance and administrative burdens, provide opportunities for greater efficiency and collaborative planning when managing our national forests, and address delays associated with litigation on critical projects. This bill encourages management activities that are undertaken through a collaborative process and protect our Western water resources.

The Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016 addresses issues that are important to protecting the water supply that much of our nation depends on. We appreciate your consideration of these important issues and urge prompt passage of this bill.

Sincerely,

National Water Resources Association
Kansas Water Congress
Southwest Kansas Groundwater Management District No. 3
Association of California Water Agencies
Colorado River Water Conservation District
Placer County Water Agency
Salt River Project
South Tahoe Public Utility District

CC

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
The Honorable Rob Bishop
The Honorable Raul Grijalva

July 11, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts & Ranking Member Stabenow:

Our organizations write to urge you to take quick action on wild fire funding reform and reform of federal forest management this summer. We are experiencing yet another above-average fire season on our National Forests, and Congress has yet to create a durable solution to the problem of fire borrowing and forest management reform. Chairman Roberts' recently introduced Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016 (S. 3085) addresses both of these issues.

Our national federal forests are facing serious threats from fires, insects, and diseases due to lack of active forest management. The poor health of our federal forests also threatens wildlife habitat, watersheds, and neighboring non-Federal lands, as well as the vitality of rural, forested communities across the country. Much like legislation passed by the House last summer, S. 3085, contains provisions intended to both address the disruption caused by fire borrowing and expedite needed forest management to improve the health and vitality of our federal forests.

S. 3085's use of Categorical Exclusions (CE's) under the National Environmental Policy Act will allow routine, collaborative projects with known effects to be more quickly analyzed and implemented. It will also allow needed forest recovery and reforestation projects to proceed more quickly, addressing a dire need created by recent extreme wildfire seasons.

S. 3085 addresses both the excessive analysis requirements currently imposed on even modest, collaboratively developed forest management projects, as well as the dysfunctional system of funding suppression costs out of forest management program accounts. Provisions in the bill limit the acreage of Categorical Exclusions, and prohibit their use in sensitive areas.

We appreciate that S. 3085 provides pilot authority for the Forest Service to experiment with binding arbitration as an alternative dispute resolution mechanism. In our experience, arbitration tends to promote collaboration and compromise. The pilot program in the bill would preserve access to judicial remedies, while allowing experimentation with a potentially time and money saving alternative.

Clearly, Congress understands that forest health conditions on over 65 million acres of our national forest system are unacceptable. Congressional leaders also understand that the wildfire suppression funding mechanisms developed in the past are no longer adequate to address the conditions we are experiencing. Like S. 3085, the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee recently released a discussion draft Wildfire Budgeting, Response, and Forest Management Act of 2016. There are many similarities between the two bills, and we urge you to work with your colleagues to bring a consensus bill to the Senate floor as soon as possible.

We urge the Senate to take up and pass legislation that addresses both the forest management crisis and the fire funding crisis. Anything less is a half measure. We stand ready to work with your committee to advance responsible solutions to these serious national problems.

Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group
American Forest Resource Council
American Forest & Paper Association
American Loggers Council
Arkansas Forestry Association
Associated Logging Contractors – Idaho
Associated Oregon Loggers
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
Forest Resources Association
Hardwood Federation
Intermountain Forest Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
Michigan Forest Products Council
Minnesota Forest Industries
Minnesota Timber Producers Association
Montana Logging Association
Montana Wood Products Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
New Mexico Forest Industries Association
Treated Wood Council
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Virginia Forestry Association



Intertribal Timber Council

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White Earth Reservation
White Mountain Apache Tribe
Yakama Nation
Yurok Tribe

July 12, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC, 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts:

The Executive Board of the Intertribal Timber Council (ITC) supports S. 3085, the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016.

We wish to particularly express our strong support for Title V which will enhance tribal input and involvement in the restoration of federal forest lands. Such restoration projects are sorely needed to improve forest health and reduce threats to lands held in trust for Indians as well as non-trust federal land upon which Indian tribes access for traditional, subsistence and treaty-guaranteed purposes.

Section 501 would provide timelines for review, approval and implementation of Tribal Forest Protection Act projects. This new authority is needed because of the underperformance of the TFPA authority. Ten years after Congress passed the TFPA, only three projects have been fully implemented, while others linger in years of procedural abyss. As a result, tribal forest lands remain at high risk of wildfire coming from adjacent federal lands. This section would give tribes the certainty to pursue TFPA projects with their federal neighbors and reduce the risk of wildfire migrating from federal lands onto Indian trust land.

Section 502 would give the Forest Service and BLM a new ability to have tribes carry out forest restoration projects in their homelands. Improvement of forest health and ecological functions are vital to maintain watersheds and fish and wildlife habitat on lands that may be subject to federally-reserved tribal rights.

Section 503 authorizes USDA to enter into "638" contracts with tribes to carry out TFPA projects, which would improve tribal participation in the program, as well as its overall effectiveness.

The ITC is a thirty-six year old association of sixty Indian tribes and Alaska Native organizations that collectively manage more than 90% of the 18 million acres of forest land held in trust by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The ITC is dedicated to pursuing the best management and protection of tribal forests and other natural resources. We actively participated in the development of the National Indian Forest Resources Management Act (PL 101-630, 1990) and the Tribal Forest Protection Act (PL 108-278, 2004). It is our pleasure to now support S. 3085.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Phil Rigdon', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Phil Rigdon
President

2000 M Street NW

Suite 550

Washington, DC 20036

Phone 202-765-3660

Fax 202-827-7924

www.forestfoundation.org info@forestfoundation.org



July 6, 2016

Senator Pat Roberts, Chairman

U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry

328A Russell Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts,

Thank you for your leadership and introduction of S. 3085, *the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016*. This legislation will address the significant wildfire suppression funding and forest management issues facing our nation's forests. As a forest conservation organization focused on helping the 22 million family forest owners in the U.S. care for their forests, so they can provide the clean water, wildlife habitat, and sustainable wood supplies we all rely on from these lands, the American Forest Foundation (AFF) shares your concerns with regard to both wildfire funding and restoration needs in our forests.

We support swift action on both of these challenges and encourage bipartisan efforts in the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committees on these important issues. We offer the following comments on issues covered by the bill, which pertain to AFF's focus on private lands.

Wildfire Funding Fix: The wildfire funding issues and the rising cost of wildfire suppression in the USDA Forest Service and Department of the Interior do not just have an impact on federal lands, but they also affect family woodland owners, specifically in two ways. First, the raiding of non-fire program funds that has occurred over the last decade has halted or eliminated work with family landowners. This work is necessary to address wildfire problems, in addition to invasive species outbreaks and wildlife habitat needs. While this work might not be as urgent as protecting a home or life, it will certainly have long-lasting effects on both the livelihoods of family landowners and the protection of critical forest resources, such as water supply.

Second, even if this raiding were to end, with the rising cost of wildfire suppression and the current method of budgeting for wildfire in annual appropriations at the 10-year average, we will continue to see shrinking funds for non-fire programs, including programs like the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry, which assists family forest owners. Some of these programs have seen as much as a 20 percent decline in funding in the last decade. This means fewer boots-on-the-ground activities to help landowners get ahead of wildfire challenges, as well as manage other challenges.

We are pleased to see that the draft bill addresses the raiding issue noted above; however, we maintain that any final solution should address both the raiding and the ongoing budget challenge of funding wildfire suppression at the 10-year average in annual appropriations.

Landscape Scale Restoration: Even as we tackle the wildfire funding challenges, it's important that we don't lose sight of the fact that the long-term solution to addressing the funding issues requires more active management of our nation's forests that are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire.

As we discussed at the Senate Agriculture Committee's hearing last fall, while public lands management is important, there are also significant wildfire risks facing family forest owners, particularly in the West. As noted in AFF's report: *Western Water Threatened by Wildfire: It's Not Just a Public Lands Issue*, released last fall, more than one-third, or 52 million acres, of the high fire risk lands in the West are private and family-owned lands.

What's even more alarming is when we analyzed important watersheds in the West, we found that some 40% of the high fire risk lands in critical watersheds are actually private and family owned. These private lands are intermixed with public lands.

With this concern in mind, we especially appreciate the fact that the State and Private Forest Landscape-scale Restoration Program is included in your bill. This Program both codifies and strengthens existing efforts of the USDA Forest Service and state forestry agencies, all of whom are beginning to find that landscape approaches involving public and private lands and are truly "cross-boundary," are essential to addressing the wildfire and other forest health and management issues. While there are additional improvements that we could suggest for the language, we believe that the overall approach is sound.

Addressing wildfire risk requires that not just one landowner in a landscape takes action to reduce fuels, but that a large portion of landowners take action, so when wildfires come through, forests are more resilient and don't burn catastrophically. Often, these landscapes are a combination of federal, state, and private land ownerships, thus, an approach that works across ownership boundaries is key. Our analysis also showed that landowners are willing to act, especially if their neighbors are also taking action.

This approach will not only help reduce risks to communities and lives, but it will also help protect important water supplies. When forests burn catastrophically, so hot they char the soil, the natural filtration that forests provide disappears, creating mudslides and significant siltation in water supplies. In fact, our analysis showed that the high wildfire risks on private lands in critical Western watersheds pose risks to water supplies for millions of Westerners and businesses.

Again, thank you for your leadership on these important issues, and for recognizing that this is not just a public lands issue. This requires resources and support for private landowners.

We look forward to working with you as this legislation moves forward, and we urge you act quickly in a bipartisan fashion.

Thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Martin", with a long horizontal line extending to the left.

Tom Martin
President & CEO



July 1, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts,

On behalf of the National Association of Counties, the only national organization that represents all 3,069 of America's Counties, thank you for your leadership in introducing S. 3085, the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016.

With the 2016 wildfire season already underway, counties continue to express concern over the rapidly declining health of our federal forests and public lands due to the persistent impacts of drought, infestation, disease and wildfire. The health of our federal forests has a direct impact on the public health, safety and economic wellbeing of counties across the United States. Not only do unhealthy forests increase community wildfire risk, they also negatively impact our access to clean water and air, threaten wildlife habitats and reduce our opportunities for forest related jobs and tourism. Counties urge Congress to enact comprehensive legislation to improve the health and wellbeing of forest lands and forest communities by promoting collaboration, streamlining regulations that hamper active forest management and protecting communities through wildfire risk reduction.

Promoting Collaboration and Streamlining Regulations for Forest Health Projects

Counties believe that active management of federal lands and forests must be done in a sustainable manner that ensures the health of our federal lands for generations to come. One way to help ensure a balanced approach to address natural resource management challenges is by promoting locally driven collaborative processes that promote consensus driven decision making. Counties across the United States have engaged in collaborative efforts to address their natural resources challenges. By bringing together a broad cross section of local stakeholders into collaborative processes, counties, industry, outdoorsmen, conservationists and federal and state land managers have built consensus on some of the most complex natural resource management challenges.

Congress can build upon the success of collaborative efforts by authorizing limited and reasonable categorical exclusions for projects that improve forest health and have been developed through consensus based collaborative processes, and providing additional tools to help ensure that collaborative efforts continue to work, accelerate and expand, like those included in S. 3085.

Counties applaud your leadership in including provisions in your legislation that will:

- Promote forest management activities that cross federal, state and private land boundaries;
- Encourage landscape wide forest management projects on federal forests;
- Work to end the practice known as “fire-borrowing”, which robs federal forest management accounts to pay for catastrophic wildfire suppression; and
- Streamline analysis and expedite review of forest management activities.

As Congress continues its important work to pass comprehensive forest management and fire funding legislation, NACo is also heartened by your interest in enacting provisions to address the negative impacts of excessive litigation that have created a culture of “analysis paralysis” within our federal forest management agencies and have hampered collaboratively developed forest projects across the nation.

While we are encouraged to see both chambers of Congress taking up legislation to improve the health and productivity of our federal forests, the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program will continue to be an important bridge program for forest counties until declines in forest production can be fully addressed. The Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program provides a critical safety-net for counties impacted by declines in forest production and the loss of forest jobs. NACo encourages the committee to work in the spirit of bipartisanship to:

- Reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools Program;
- Reform SRS to permit greater flexibility in how Title III funds are used at the local level; and
- Authorize equitable revenue sharing from stewardship contracting projects.

Reauthorize Secure Rural Schools

The SRS program provides crucial support to local schools, transportation infrastructure, law enforcement and other county services in more than 720 counties and 4,000 school districts, impacting nine million students across 41 states. Unfortunately, the SRS program expired on September 30, 2015 and has yet to be reauthorized.

Historically, the federal government has shared 25 percent of federal forest revenues with counties to compensate them for federal ownership of forests. Federal forest lands cannot be taxed at the local level, yet counties must still provide many essential services. SRS was first enacted in 2000 as local governments faced steep reductions in timber revenue sharing due to federal policies that limited revenue-generating activities within federal forests. Current revenue sharing payments are no longer sufficient to support the services forest counties must provide.

When the authorization for SRS lapsed in FY 2014, forest payments to counties decreased by over 80 percent. Counties and school districts nationwide faced dramatic budgetary shortfalls and began preparations to halt infrastructure projects, terminate employees, cancel teacher contracts, and

reduce numerous other services as a result. In that instance, Congress reauthorized the SRS program retroactively and provided full SRS payments to counties. However, in many cases services had already been impacted in counties and school districts.

Counties urge Congress to provide local governments with the budgetary certainty they need and encourage Congress to work swiftly to reauthorize the SRS program for FY 2016 and into the future, until federal forest production and revenue sharing can be restored to sustainable historic levels.

SRS Title III Flexibility

Additionally, although USFS lands are federally owned and not subject to county property taxes, counties must still provide critical services – such as law enforcement and search and rescue – for residents and visitors on forest lands. Under Title III of SRS, a county may use a portion of funds to reimburse county services for search and rescue and other emergency services, including fire protection, which are performed on federal land and paid for using county funds.

In 2012, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) made recommendations to significantly restrict what expenditures should be allowable under Title III, including a finding that that law enforcement patrols should be ineligible for reimbursement. The USFS adopted GAO's recommendations, which has caused considerable hardship for counties. Congress' intent when enacting SRS was to provide relief to county sheriffs' departments that must dedicate local public safety resources to costly search and rescue and law enforcement operations on federal land.

Recent House-passed forestry legislation, H.R. 2647, included language to provide flexibility under Title III of Secure Rural Schools. We encourage you to restore Congressional intent and include legislative language in S. 3085 to restore flexibility for counties to use a portion of SRS Title III program funding to support law enforcement patrols and to ensure county first-responders have the equipment and training they need to provide high-quality emergency services for county residents and the millions of public lands visitors each year.

Stewardship Contracting Revenue Sharing

Finally, we encourage you to include legislative language to reform stewardship contracting authorities to restore historic revenue sharing from stewardship contracting projects with counties.

The growth in the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) stewardship contracting program in recent years demonstrates that forest management projects can work to achieve both forest restoration goals and generate significant revenue. Stewardship contracting allows the USFS to implement forest management projects supported by revenues generated from timber sales generated by the project.

Counties support stewardship contracting as one of the many tools at land managers' disposal to responsibly manage our federal lands. Historically, America's counties have shared in timber receipts with the federal government, receiving 25 percent of revenues generated. However, since its

inception, revenues generated through stewardship contracting have been exempt from revenue sharing with counties.

Counties are active partners, in stewardship contracting initiatives across the United States and forest revenue sharing payments support critical county services. Counties believe stewardship contracting revenues must be shared equitably with county governments consistent with historic practices.

Counties encourage Congress to restore the historic compact between forest counties and the federal government by extending forest revenue sharing to USFS revenues generated by stewardship contracting projects. Sharing revenues from stewardship contracting will provide much needed support for forest counties, their roads, schools and other critical services. NACo looks forward to continuing to work with Congress to further strengthen forest revenue sharing between counties and the federal government.

Moving forward, counties encourage Congress to work swiftly to enact meaningful forest management and fire borrowing reforms to ensure the long-term viability of federal forests and forest counties and to reauthorize and reform the SRS program for FY 2016 and into the future, to restore financial certainty for forest counties and promote flexibility and equitable revenue sharing within the program.

If we can be of any assistance to you in your efforts, please do not hesitate to contact NACo Associate Legislative Director Chris Marklund at 202.942.4207 or cmarklund@naco.org.

Sincerely,



Matthew D. Chase
Executive Director



July 5, 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:

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) appreciates the Committee's work on this important legislation and ***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. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on S.3085, the Emergency Wildfire and Forest Management Act of 2016. Resolving fire funding challenges and enhancing active forest management, which will actually reduce fire funding challenges, are top priorities for the forestry community. In this letter we want to convey our support for key provisions and ask for your consideration in modifying a few provisions in the legislation. First we want to thank you for your leadership in trying to find a solution to the 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.

Addressing Fire Borrowing: In terms of fire transfers and borrowing, NASF much appreciates the draft 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.

This legislation would provide access to disaster funding to budget for those years when wildfire suppression funding is well beyond what the agency's budget can absorb. We understand that there are two proposals being discussed in

Congress to address this challenge: 1) a budget cap adjustment and 2) access to the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund, as is described in this legislation. NASF does not have a preference in how this challenge is resolved.

However the approach outlined in the bill is only a partial solution. Finding a source for off-line emergency wildfire suppression funding only solves the fire borrowing challenge. It will not solve the erosion of funding for non-wildfire suppression programs. **NASF recommends 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.** The Committee could consider removing off-line funding from the ten year average calculation or selecting a specific year for base line wildfire suppression funding and amounts above that specific year will be funded off-line in all future budget years.

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). The forest management reforms in this legislation are generally in line with the recommendations of that policy position. 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.

Suggestions for Modifications to the Legislation.

We would appreciate an opportunity to visit with the Committee 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. 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 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.

Again we appreciate the opportunity to provide comment to the Committee on the legislation, urge the Senate to work to pass legislation this year. We look forward to working with the Committee as the legislation moves 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

Executive Director
Jay Farrell

2015-16 Executive Committee

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