



December 7, 2009

The Honorable Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kurt Schrader
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Greg Walden
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Walden, Herseth Sandlin and Schrader:


The Society of American Foresters (SAF), the national scientific and educational organization representing the forestry profession with over 14,000 members, strongly supports the bipartisan Healthy Forests Restoration Amendment Acts of 2009 and Incentives to Increase Use of Renewable Biomass Act of 2009. As an organization chartered to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry for the benefit of society, the SAF believes that if enacted, these authorities and incentives would help to improve the health and resilience of federal forests while also producing renewable energy from woody biomass.

A combination of fire suppression, drought, climate change and other factors have resulted in declining and poor forest health in many of our federal forests. As a result, millions of acres are at high risk of catastrophic wildfire or insect and disease epidemics. In fact, we're already seeing entire forested landscapes dead or dying due to an unprecedented (in modern time) bark beetle outbreak. Unless and until health is restored in our forests, we will continue to see this calamity. The Healthy Forests Restoration Act was passed in 2003 to address catastrophic wildfire, insects and disease through forest restoration projects, but needs clarifying amendments to allow its intended implementation on the ground. To give our forests a fighting chance to adapt to a changing climate, we must restore health and resiliency. We believe this legislation will help accomplish this goal.

Projects to restore forest health many times result in woody biomass as a byproduct. Most of this biomass currently has little to no value. In many rural areas, biomass can be used to create heat or power that can be utilized by schools, hospitals, government or other buildings. Utilizing biomass helps to offset the cost of removal from the forest while also displacing the use of fossil fuels for energy. Encouraging this type of biomass utilization is a win-win for many communities by improving forest health, reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, using renewable energy in place of fossil fuels and creating local family-wage jobs in our rural communities.

The SAF applauds your efforts to give land managers the tools needed to bring our forests back to health while also giving communities an opportunity to invest in biomass energy. Thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,


Bernard Hubbard
President
Society of American Foresters