

Fiscal Year 2009 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Budget
Testimony by Tom Thompson, President
Society of American Foresters
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
April 23, 2008

The Society of American Foresters (SAF), with over 14,000 forestry professionals located across the country in all segments of the profession, believes in sound and scientifically-based management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests. Funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service (USFS), both contained within the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, play particularly important roles in maintaining, conserving, and improving the nation's forests.

The 755 million acres of forests in the U.S. are undergoing constant pressures from wildfires, insect infestations, and other catastrophic disturbances, conversion to competing non-forest land uses, and the effects of climate change on forest types and health, as well as on wildlife habitat. Simultaneously, our nation's forests are expected to provide recreational opportunities (more than 137 million annual visits to national forests alone), as well as supply the economic services and goods demanded by society. However, the direction in which federal budgets are moving makes resisting these pressures and delivering these forest goods all the more difficult—in large part due to the increasing percentage of the agencies' budgets consumed by wildfire preparedness and suppression.

The SAF remains concerned and committed to the sustainability of our nation's forests. Such sustainability implies and demands a balance of the social, environmental and economic values realized from forests— a balance that is presently at risk of being upset. To help resist these pressures, to ensure the sustainable delivery of forest-related goods and services, and to ensure the future of this critical natural resource, the SAF urges a focus in three funding areas and the range of programs within the DOI and USFS budgets that address these key areas (as outlined below). The SAF's key priorities are:

- 1. Forest health on both public and private forests**
- 2. Forest research and inventory**
- 3. Private forest conservation**

Forest Health

Today, more than 190 million acres of federal forests and over 90 million acres of non-federal forests are threatened by a potent combination of wildfire, insects, diseases, invasive species, and other factors. To address these ongoing threats, sufficient resources must be allocated to management programs capable of preparing and mitigating for their effects. **To adequately address these issues, the SAF urges funding levels above the Administration's FY 2009 proposed budgets for the forest health programs and**

wildland fire accounts in both the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior as outlined in detail below.

Wildfire Suppression: The SAF remains deeply concerned over the rising costs of wildfire suppression efforts, and more importantly, the increasing percentage of the agencies' budgets devoted to that activity.

The borrowing of funds from non-wildfire accounts during the course of each fire season presents severe challenges to the agencies' other programs. This leads directly to the inability to deliver the goods and services demanded by society, and that are crucial to the agencies' missions. This is no more apparent than in the case of the Forest Service: the percentage of the agency's budget dedicated to wildland fire suppression has risen to 43 percent for FY 09. Suppression costs in the Forest Service alone are nearly \$1 billion, up from less than \$600 million only 7 years ago. This trend is forcing the agency to retreat to what it considers its "core" missions—which will in turn force undesirable effects on a large portion of the agency's programs, and on the forests that depend on those programs. **Congress must, therefore, both address the consumption of critical agency programs by the ever-expanding wildfire budget, as well as continue to urge the agencies to adopt cost-containment measures and increased accountability for wildfire suppression activities.**

Reducing hazardous fuels: Any effort to address wildfire threats mandates addressing the accumulation of hazardous fuels on the forested landscape. The USFS and the DOI programs to do so are critical components to ensuring forest health and reducing suppression costs over the long-term. Efforts by the agencies to treat such fuels should be prioritized to focus on Condition Class 3 lands, on restoring natural fires regimes, on mitigating and adapting to the anticipated effects of climate change on fire hazards, and on protecting at-risk communities where appropriate. The agencies should also be encouraged to better coordinate the expanded use of wildland fire to meet fuel reduction goals where suitable. **The SAF supports the FY 2008 enacted levels for hazardous fuels accounts for both the USFS and DOI, and suggests FY 09 funding at or above those levels.**

Forest research and inventory

With 58 million acres of forest at significant risk for insect or disease mortality and with the available dollars for forest-related research falling nationwide, it is imperative that the funding for research provided by both the USFS and DOI not likewise diminish. Investments in forestry research are investments in the future health and suitability of both public and private forests nationwide. The nation's forestry research is conducted by a number of entities, including federal agencies, universities and private industry, with the majority of the federal funding focused within the USDA Forest Research and Development Program. USFS R&D conducts essential research on pressing topics such as climate change, insect infestations and pathogen treatments, renewable energy development and woody biomass conversion technology, forest products research to maintain the competitiveness of the U.S. industry, and in areas such as social science to better understand how to improve the agency's relationship with the public and to better

meet the public’s needs. **SAF urges a moderate elevation in funding to a level of \$290 million for the USFS Research and Development program.**

Forest Inventory and Analysis: Though now included within the broader Inventory and Monitoring R&D, the USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program is the backbone of forestry knowledge in the U.S., providing the only national census of forests across all forest ownerships. The program forms the foundation of much of the analysis that is occurring on national trends affecting forest lands, including forest fragmentation, forest health, and climate change effects. Through FIA, the USFS partners with state forestry agencies and the private sector in a unique data sharing relationship whereby the nation as a whole truly benefits from this research. **We strongly urge Congress to fully support the Administration’s proposed increase of \$1.9 million and fully fund the FIA program at \$73 million in FY 2009—any FIA decreases resulting from proposed decreases in State and Private Forestry should be considered so that the FIA program does not see a net decline in funding.**

Private forest conservation

Private forests comprise some 427 million acres in the U.S. All of these forests face a suite of challenges: forest health concerns, pressures to convert to non-forest uses as land values rise, and changing markets for forest products and overseas competition. Forty-four million acres of these forests are at substantial risk of increases in housing density in the next 30 years. In many ways these private forest are some of the nation’s most important, as they can be managed for the broadest array of outputs—they are the source of the majority of the nation’s wood supply, and provide recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, and are a source of clean air and water, as well as an important aesthetic component to urban, suburban, and exurban regions. Programs within the USFS State and Private Forestry help encourage private forest landowners to continue to manage their lands as forests, and in a sustainable fashion. Maintaining these forests is becoming even more critical in light of the role of forests in carbon sequestration, and the resultant carbon emissions when those forests are lost. **We are deeply concerned that the Administration proposes such a drastic cut in the programs critical to private landowners within the State and Private area. The SAF strongly urges restoring the State and Private forest program to \$207.5 million.**

US Department of the Interior

Program (in millions of dollars)	FY 2008 Enacted	FY 2009 Proposed	FY 2009 SAF Recommendation
DOI Wildland Fire Management Total	808.0	850.1	941.1
Preparedness	276.5	277.7	300.7
Suppression	289.8	335.2	350.2
Hazardous Fuels	199.6	202.8	250.8
Joint Fire Science	5.9	0	5.0
BLM Public Domain Forest Management	10.6	9.5	10.6

BLM OR and CA Grant Lands Total	108.5	108.3	109.0
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USDA Forest Service

Discretionary Appropriations (in million of dollars)	FY 2008 Enacted	FY 2009 Proposed	FY 2009 SAF Recommendation
Forest and Rangeland Research (R&D)	285.9	263.0	290.9
State and Private Forestry	262.8	109.5	207.5
Forest Health Management -Fed	54.1	45.0	50.0
Forest Health Management-Coop	44.5	10.0	40.0
State Fire Assistance	32.6	25.0	30.0
Volunteer Fire Assistance	5.9	5.0	5.0
Forest Stewardship	29.5	5.0	20.0
Forest Legacy	52.3	12.5	45.0
Urban and Community Forestry	27.7	5.0	15.0
Economic Action Programs	4.2	0	0
International Forestry	7.4	2.0	2.0
National Forest System Total	1,469.6	1,344.5	1,358.5
Land Management Planning	48.8	52.6	52.6
Inventory and Monitoring	166.6	146.5	160.5
Recreation, Wilderness & Heritage	262.6	237.0	237.0
Forest Products	322.5	322.7	322.7
Vegetation and Watershed Management	177.4	165.3	165.3
Wildland Fire Management Total	1,943.5	1,976.6	2,107.6
Preparedness	665.8	588.4	675.4
Suppression	845.6	993.9	993.9
Hazardous Fuels	310.1	297.0	325.0
Rehab & Restoration	10.8	0	10.0
Fire Research and Development	23.5	22.0	23.0
Joint Fire Sciences Program	7.9	8.0	8.0
NFP Forest Health-Fed	14.0	14.3	14.3
NFP Forest Health- Coop Lands	9.9	10.0	10.0
NFP State Fire Assistance	50.0	35.0	40.0
NFP Volunteer Fire Assistance	7.9	8.0	8.0
Capital Improvement & Maintenance	488.8	405.8	410.8
Facilities	121.8	119.6	119.6
Roads	227.9	227.0	227.0
Trails	76.4	50.0	55.0
Deferred Maintenance	9.0	9.1	9.1