

March 22, 2010

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

TESTIMONY

SENATE ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS AND FORESTS

HEARING ON

S. 2798, NATIONAL FOREST INSECT AND DISEASE EMERGENCY ACT OF 2009

On behalf of the Society of American Foresters (SAF), the national scientific and educational organization representing the forestry profession with over 14,000 members, please accept the following testimony for the Hearing Record on S. 2798, the National Forest Insect and Disease Emergency Act of 2009. As an organization chartered to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry for the benefit of society, the SAF strongly supports S. 2798 and commends Senator Mark Udall and Senator James Risch for their bipartisan leadership on this important bill. S. 2798 is a simple, common sense bill that could be easily implemented by land management agencies to more-quickly address problems associated with extensive bark beetle infestation in the western United States. We urge the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee to advance this legislation as soon as possible.

As millions of acres of forests across the western United States are infested, dead and dying of mountain pine beetle and other insects and diseases, a great deal of work will be needed to remove dead and dying trees to protect public safety, roads, trails, power lines, watersheds and protect communities from catastrophic wildfire. Further, by preventing uncharacteristically hot wildfires, we can encourage the establishment of a new forest by protecting forest seed sources, preventing cooked soils and other damage that hinders or prohibits forest regeneration.

Given current federal land management laws, regulations and case law, there is virtually no way this work can be done in a timely manner. In fact, the Forest Service will only be able to address the direst of needs even if unlimited funding were devoted to this problem. S. 2798 will greatly aid the Forest Service by reducing the amount of time and resources needed to plan and implement projects to protect life, property and other important forest values.

Again, we commend you for the simple, common sense approach of this bill, but also have some recommendations:

1. Extend the authorities and designation in the bill to include Bureau of Land Management (BLM/public lands) lands. Across the west, many national forests are intermixed with BLM land and treating both land ownerships is critical (for example,

22% of Colorado's forestland is managed by the BLM and over 320,000 acres of forestland in Idaho is managed by the agency).

2. Authorize 20-year stewardship contracts. Given the landscape-scale restoration work needed to restore forest health, 20-year stewardship contracts could serve as an important tool for land management agencies. These long-term contracts could encourage larger projects while also providing more certainty and consistency for forest contractors.
3. Ensure appropriate funding of this legislation.
4. Finally, we also ask that some focus be placed on green forests that have not yet been infested to prevent mortality from bark beetles. Published scientific and case studies have shown that in some forests, if aggressive thinning to a prescribed density is completed, the forest can survive attacks from bark beetles. This will be important to protecting existing habitat and other forest values for the future as a diverse, multi-aged forest is much more resilient than the even-aged forests we see today.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.