

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I am Carol Daly, representing the Communities Committee and the Society of American Foresters. The Communities Committee grew out of the Seventh American Forest Congress and is driven by the recognition that there is a vital interdependence between the nation's forests and communities. The Committee and its constituents work to increase the stewardship role for local communities in restoring and maintaining the integrity and biodiversity of their forest ecosystems, thereby enhancing both community well-being and the long-term sustainability of our forests - public and private, urban and rural.

While the issue on which I am to testify about today is focused around community planning and collaboration, it has far reaching forest management implications. Thus I am representing not only the Communities Committee but am also representing the views of the Society of American Foresters, professional foresters who have a deep commitment to stewardship of our forest resources and working with communities to maintain and improve their forest resources. The Society of American Foresters (SAF) represents over 16,000 forestry professionals in all sectors of the profession. SAF members pledge to use their conservation ethic to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.

The Healthy Forests Restoration Act (HFRA) gives professional forest managers, community forestry practitioners, landowners, and federal, tribal, state, and local governments a variety of new tools to use in addressing hazardous fuels reduction and forest restoration needs on national forests and nearby private lands. Today I would like to address one of these tools, the Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP) process and the opportunities and challenges it presents as we move forward in implementing HFRA.

Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan (CWPP). To help communities participate fully in HFRA's benefits, SAF and the Communities Committee, together with the National Association of Counties, the National Association of State Foresters, and the Western Governors' Association, recently wrote and published *Preparing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan: A Handbook for Wildland-Urban Interface Communities*.

Ideally, the creation of a CWPP draws together forestry professionals, local governments, fire departments, and other concerned agencies, groups, and individuals to collaboratively identify areas at risk of wildfire and develop an action plan for reducing those risks. Some benefits we see in the process are that:

? Existing scientific information, experience, and local (indigenous) knowledge can be brought to the table.

? All participants learn more about the forests around them as they define the community's wildland-urban interface (WUI) and assess its wildfire risks. This greater awareness and understanding can then result in better informed perspectives on forest management in general.

? Residents of the WUI find out what they can do in constructing or retrofitting their homes and maintaining their properties to lessen the risk of loss to wildfire

? The setting of fuels treatment priorities for both federal and non-federal lands is done only after an open and inclusive community discussion of the options.

? The CWPP action strategy covers all land ownerships, both public and private, and responsibilities for implementation are appropriately distributed.

? There is an opportunity for a multiparty monitoring process to help ensure that the effects of the plan's implementation, including specific results on the ground, are carefully evaluated and needed improvements identified.

Planning issues needing further consideration. Collaborative planning is the heart of the CWPP process, yet in this (as in other recent forest-related legislation) mandates for collaboration are not backed up with financial and technical support. Local governments, fire departments, and state forestry agencies - the decision makers in the CWPP process - generally have little or no experience in collaborative processes. It therefore falls to community-based forestry groups (like the one I staff) or other non-governmental organizations to organize and facilitate the collaboration. Lacking HFRA, National Fire Plan, stewardship contracting, or other federal support for that work, it is necessary for us to seek funding from foundations or other private sources to pay for it. Such funders, however, are increasingly reluctant to pay for the facilitation of federal programs, arguing that they should be the government's funding responsibility. As critical as collaboration is to the success of HFRA, it should no longer be left an unfunded mandate. We are appreciative of the House's efforts to set aside \$5 million in the FY 2005 Interior Appropriations Bill to cost share with communities for community wildfire protection plans. We hope the Senate will consider similar action.

Overall, there is a need for all entities involved in implementing HFRA and developing CWPPs, including federal, state, and local governments, state agencies, professional foresters, and community leaders, to gain a better working knowledge of collaborative processes. This will enhance their effectiveness as they move forward, working together to fund and carry out HFRA projects.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, there is also a need for better information and technical assistance to enable communities to participate in HFRA activities. The handbook prepared by SAF, the Communities Committee and our co-sponsors has been widely distributed in hard copy through our various networks and is available on many websites, but it alone is not enough. Some options for building wider public awareness include direct informational mailings from the relevant federal and state agency offices to stakeholders in their areas, press releases, CWPP training workshops, and other appropriate tools. Local SAF chapters, community forestry groups, and others can be valuable partners in such efforts. We need to give particular attention to poorer or low capacity communities (those lacking adequate technical or financial resources). Otherwise they face a double-barreled threat: without a CWPP and proactive risk reduction strategy in operation, they are more vulnerable to wildfire losses, plus, should they have a severe wildfire, their ability to recover from it is less than that of a higher capacity community. It is in these communities where the leadership of government agencies, professional foresters, community practitioners, and interested stakeholders is critical and should be fostered.

When a collaborative process is begun and communities study local forest stand conditions, watersheds, threatened and endangered species, and other critical resources, they are almost certain to identify the need for ecosystem management and restoration work which goes

beyond hazardous fuels treatment. CWPP planning should not be a process in isolation, but should feed into other relevant federal, state, and local planning activities.

Carrying out a CWPP. When possible, HFRA projects on public lands should be conducted in coordination with similar projects on adjacent private lands, including those funded under the National Fire Plan. This not only results in more consistent and effective treatments, but also may minimize the number of entries required, simplify issues of access across private lands, and reduce total implementation costs. The ability to expedite environmental analysis of HFRA projects should make it possible to improve project timing.

Over-reliance on the stewardship contracting mechanism to fund HFRA projects to implement CWPPs should be avoided. While some hazardous fuels treatment activities will yield saleable products that can be exchanged to cover all or a significant part of the treatment services being provided, many will not. Until more or larger markets are created for what are now low- or no-value materials, adequate direct funding for HFRA on both federal and non-federal lands is essential.

The increase in hazardous fuels reduction contracting opportunities arising from HFRA and the National Fire Plan has encouraged new contractors specializing in such work to enter the field, while at the same time many existing forestry or logging contractors are re-focusing their operations and investing in equipment suited to this growing market niche. On public lands projects, the transition has not always gone smoothly. For example, the Forest Service's normal cruising practices still tend to focus on commercial materials, and the estimated amount of small diameter, low-value material to be removed has been greatly understated in some bid offerings, leading to large financial losses for contractors who relied on the accuracy of those figures. Bonding requirements and contracting processes that worked well on traditional timber sales also need to be revisited in the context of HFRA.

Monitoring and evaluating progress. Section 102(g)(5) of HFRA directs the Forest Service and BLM to establish a collaborative multiparty monitoring, evaluation, and accountability process for projects "where significant interest is expressed" to "assess the positive or negative ecological and social effects of authorized hazardous fuel reduction projects." These monitoring activities will be an important factor in proving the value of the program and allaying existing reservations about HFRA's intent and impact. Expeditiously gathering the "lessons learned" from early projects, identifying both successes and problem areas, and using the information for adaptive management, for improving future projects, will be highly valuable. Congress wisely included a provision for operational funding for these monitoring activities, and provided that the agencies could enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with, or provide grants to, "small or micro-businesses, cooperatives, nonprofit organizations, Youth Conservation Corps work crews, or related State, local, and other non-Federal conservation corps" to collect monitoring data.

The joint Forest Service/BLM interim field guide for HFRA implementation has added a requirement that "multiparty monitoring will be subject to available funding and the ability of stakeholders to contribute funds or in-kind services." The Wildland Fire Leadership Council's

proposed monitoring protocol goes even further and requires that stakeholders wishing to participate should have "appropriate skills and knowledge for monitoring" and "must be willing to share costs." Such requirements could be used to limit or discourage multiparty participation and would defeat the purpose of this important component of HFRA.

Final thoughts. HFRA is essentially a very large pilot project with respect to many of the new tools for hazardous fuels reduction in Title I. It is still very much a work in progress and will take time and leadership from all involved, including Congress, all levels of government, professional foresters, community practitioners, and concerned stakeholders to make it a success. Some of its provisions were able to be implemented immediately and are already producing results. Others are just beginning to be tested in action. We urge that adequate time be allowed for a full exploration of the Act's potential, and encourage Congress meanwhile to continue its strong commitment to and funding for HFRA.

While we are supportive of the increased emphasis through HFRA and the Healthy Forests Initiative on forest health and wildfire risk reduction, there is still a need for greater reforms within the federal agencies to address the need for better, more comprehensive management and restoration of our forests. Building on the concept of partnerships and community involvement in HFRA, we, as a nation, need to continuously seek opportunities to manage our forests comprehensively, meaning across ownerships within watersheds and ecosystems. CWPPs begin to create this comprehensive approach, and we urge similar partnerships and collaborations for forest management and restoration across the country, not just in fire-prone forests.

Both the Communities Committee and SAF would be happy to work with the Congress, the Forest Service, BLM, and others as appropriate, to help address the issues we have raised today.

Thank you for your kind attention.