

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters, I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today on the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act. NASF is a non-profit organization that represents the directors of the state forestry agencies from all fifty states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. State Foresters restore, manage, and protect state and private forests across the U.S., which together encompass two-thirds of our nation's forests.

Every year throughout the United States, forest catastrophes rob society of the clean water, wildlife habitat, wood fiber, beautiful scenery, and many other important values that these lands would otherwise provide. Repairing lands that have been ravaged by fire, hurricanes, ice storms, and other disasters must occur as quickly as possible to minimize these losses. This bill offers improvements that will speed the implementation of recovery projects following such events and authorizes badly needed research in support of these efforts.

We are very encouraged to see language in the bill recognizing that these events can occur across large-scale landscapes and that the ensuing restoration work needs to be coordinated across all involved ownerships. It is of particular concern to State Foresters that too often the lack of recovery work on federal lands creates additional threats for adjoining state and private lands, all of which have been impacted by the same disaster. The inclusion of landscape assessment efforts across all ownerships, as well as a focus on the preparation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans, will provide needed emphasis on restoration and protection for all lands.

I would like to point out just a few examples of how we have to deal with forest recovery treatments at a landscape level if we are going to be responsible caretakers for the nation's overall sustainable forest resource.

When an ice storm causes widespread damage to trees, the affected region frequently sees a buildup in harmful insect populations and forest diseases when pathogens find weakened, ice-broken hosts that are primed for invasion. If any particular landowner is slow to bring their forest back to a healthy condition, their land becomes the center for this forest pest buildup. Eventually the insects and pathogens will move from the damaged, un-restored forests to surrounding healthy forests. In these instances, landowners who worked diligently to restore their lands will be harmed by the lack of action on the part of their neighbors.

In February, 2003 an ice storm heavily impacted central and northeastern Kentucky. The storm, which caused severe damage to forests by uprooting trees and breaking limbs, affected federal, state, and privately owned land. In response to the damage on the Tygarts State Forest, the Kentucky Division of Forestry quickly began a process to remove the downed and damaged timber to initiate the forest restoration process. Twelve short months after the ice storm had passed, the salvage harvest was completed and the forest was left to recover.

Private forest landowners who were impacted by the storm were often less successful in their efforts to respond to the damaged forests. Many were simply unable to afford the cost of hiring a consulting forester to prepare the sale of the damaged and downed timber. For others, the downed timber could not be sold due to the lack of markets for the material. In the end, these

forests where treatment was not possible will take longer to recover.

The ice storm of 2003 also damaged several thousand acres of the northern end of the Cumberland District on the Daniel Boone National Forest. Forest health protection specialists and pathologists with the USDA Forest Service began a survey of damage to the forests following the storm. Based on their findings, the agency determined that a restoration harvest would be necessary to reduce the vulnerability of the forest to insect and disease epidemics. Five months later, the Forest Service completed a draft environmental impact statement and asked the public to review the document and provide comments. In April, 2004 the final environmental impact statement was completed and by November of that year, an environmental assessment had been completed. The first on-the-ground recovery activities are expected to begin this month, three-and-a-half years after the storm. To make matters worse, a lawsuit challenging the agency's environmental assessment decision is expected to be filed soon.

In another case, shortly after noon on July 4, 1999, a wide line of intense, fast-moving thunderstorms - a weather pattern meteorologists call a derecho - swept eastward through the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), contained within the Superior National Forest in northern Minnesota. The tall column of thunderheads expelled downbursts that created straight-line winds, which gusted to more than 90 miles per hour. The storm left a trail of downed timber, roughly 500,000 acres in size, parallel to the Canadian border. Approximately 370,000 acres of this devastation fell within the BWCAW.

Within days of the storm, state and federal work crews piled into the woods with crosscut saws and some chain saws, clearing debris from 1,520 campsites, 551 portages, more than 100 miles of hiking trails, and a similar length of ski and snowmobile trails. Minnesota DNR and USDA Forest Service foresters held timber sales to clean up more than 5,000 acres of downed trees on state and federal land outside the wilderness area. An agreement signed with the federal Council on Environmental Quality for the last three months of 1999 streamlined the environmental approval process for the large-scale cleanup. Logging reduced the fuel for fires that could endanger cabins, homes, and resorts along the Gunflint Trail. In addition, state, county, and industry foresters helped private landowners find loggers to clean up their damaged timber and gave information on long-term management planning and reforestation cost-sharing assistance.

As no logging is permitted in federal wilderness areas, work on the BWCAW was limited to clearing portages and campsites from debris. Any significant work, such as hand clearing of downed wood and prescribed burning, had to wait for the completion of an environmental impact statement, which was eventually completed in 2001. A Forest Service fuels risk assessment report found that areas of once-dense forest has as much as 50 to 100 tons of dead wood per acre, forming a potentially perfect and nearly endless supply of explosive fuel for a forest fire of devastating proportions. On July 14, 2006 a lightning strike started a fire in the BWCAW that now encompasses 31,830 acres. As of July 28, the fire was 65 percent contained at an estimated cost of \$4.7 million.

While FERRA does not apply to federal wilderness areas, this example highlights the difference between forests where quick action was taken following a catastrophic event and

where little to no action was taken. In those areas where forest managers moved quickly, the forest is well on its way to recovery.

At this very moment in the southern United States, there is a growing danger of catastrophic fire due to the huge volumes of downed woody material left in the wake of hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma and dry weather currently affecting the region. Any landowner who is unable or unwilling to act quickly to clean up these ravaged lands is contributing to this risk. Once the fire starts - regardless of the ownership - the flames know no boundary. Federal land managers in the Gulf States know they must move quickly to address the substantial buildup of downed trees and reforest these areas quickly to prevent large wildfires and the danger of soil erosion. We fear the current federal review process may delay restoration activities until after damage from wildfire, insects and diseases, and soil erosion has occurred and has spread to adjacent state and private land.

For a number of years now federal lands in the western United States have experienced an increasing number of very large fires. Only a small percentage of these lands has received treatments to restore and revegetate the burned forestland effectively. In this case, the lands are characterized by large volumes of dead wood and large expanses of highly volatile brush that persist for many years. The likelihood of a re-burn in these areas - often as difficult to control as the original fire - is very high. Accompanying this high likelihood of yet another catastrophic fire is, again, the attendant risk to any adjacent landowner.

For the Forest Service and BLM to perform as responsible neighbors and good stewards over the large estate of federally owned lands in the U.S., they must be able to deal with these disasters quickly and effectively. In recognition of the fact that these catastrophes do not stop at any single boundary line, we need to be able to deal with restoration issues across the various levels of government. Acknowledging that the body of scientific research available on the subject of forest recovery after major catastrophes is limited, we also need to better capitalize on the learning opportunities that may present themselves when such disasters occur. NASF is pleased to see a research component within this legislation to help address this need.

While federal forest managers are often constrained by process and regulations, state and private forest managers are often constrained by funding availability. The ability to move quickly to treat private lands is virtually useless if adequate funding is not available. State Foresters are pleased to see several funding sources addressed in the bill. Of particular interest is the ability of the Secretary to use FEMA funding in federally declared disaster areas to restore forests on non-federal lands. Currently, however, FEMA assistance may be used only when the President issues a disaster declaration. We recommend the legislation be modified to allow the Secretary to issue the necessary federal declaration.

To maximize the effectiveness of Special Recovery Projects, we recommend a dedicated funding source for these efforts. We also encourage you to strengthen the effectiveness of Community Assessments by expanding beyond communities impacted by wildfire to include the impact to the community's trees and forests from windstorms and insect and disease attacks.

We appreciate the measures that are proposed in this legislation and look forward to helping in whatever way we can to promote its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I

am happy to answer any questions you may have.