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Forest Service Council Legislative Committee

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NFFE FOREST SERVICE COUNCIL PRAISES ONE-YEAR DEFUND OF FOREST SERVICE A-76 PROGRAM

Washington, DC – A provision in the fiscal year 2008 omnibus appropriations bill, signed into law by President Bush yesterday, cuts funding for the Forest Service competitive sourcing program in FY08. Sec. 415(a)(2) of Division F of the bill reads: “None of the funds made available by this or any other Act may be used in fiscal year 2008 for competitive sourcing studies and any related activities involving Forest Service personnel.”

The language that was signed into law is actually stronger than that previously approved by the House, which prohibited expenditure of “funds available to the Forest Service” for competitive sourcing purposes. Because of concerns that the original language could be interpreted to allow continuation of interagency competitive sourcing studies involving fire training and dispatch personnel, the Council Legislative Committee worked with Congressional staff to close this potential loophole.

House Report language accompanying the bill noted that “alleged savings are not substantiated” and listed a number of serious problems that led to this action, including: previous wide-spread management lapses which required legislative action, failure to implement accounting and reporting requirements concerning the program’s costs, and inadequate consideration of potential impacts on the agency’s ability to provide emergency wildfire staffing. Senate Report language makes it clear that the restriction also applies to “pre-planning activities, including feasibility studies.”

“We will continue to advocate for a regulatory framework that allows the agency to be managed effectively,” said Mark Davis, Chair of the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) Forest Service Council’s Legislative Committee, noting that legislation is required to empower agency officials to reverse previous A-76 outcomes that have resulted in extra layers of bureaucracy and huge hidden inefficiencies and costs. “This is an important victory for employees and American taxpayers, but we still have work to do.”

“We offer our deepest thanks to the 110th Congress for stepping in and using its power of the purse to stop the wasteful Forest Service competitive sourcing program in its tracks, before it can do any more harm,” added Ron Thatcher, President of the NFFE Forest Service Council. “This decisive act is an important first step to placing the stewardship of America’s natural treasures back in the hands of public servants who are truly committed to caring for the land and serving the citizens of our great nation.”