



P.O. Box 793  
Lincoln, CA 95648  
nafsboard@fsx.org

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Honorable Jeff Bingaman  
Chair  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC

Re: FY2011 Appropriation for the U.S. Forest Service

Dear Chairman Bingaman:

This letter sets forth the recommendations of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees regarding the F.Y. 2011 budget for the U.S. Forest Service. Members of the Association are men and women who spent their professional careers involved with the protection and management of our nation's forests and in research. Most members spent their careers working on the National Forests and Grasslands. We remain committed to the statutory management objectives for these lands that are vital to the well-being of the American people. We believe it is important, even in periods of tight budgets, to provide adequate protection and stewardship for these lands so they can serve the people and provide needed natural resources, such as water, over the long run.

We want to acknowledge the efforts of this Committee to maintain the capability of the Forest Service to carry out its vital missions in the face of clearly inadequate budget requests in recent years. The President's proposed budget for FY2011 shows much better recognition of the importance of Forest Service programs. Nevertheless, we feel it falls short in several areas that are discussed below.

**Research**

With the changed structure of the forest products industry, forest management research by major forest products firms has largely disappeared. Cutbacks in State budgets have reduced forest management research at universities. That leaves the Forest Service as *the* source of the science we need to properly manage our nation's forests. We badly need more answers to questions about how to manage forests for various purposes in a period of climate change. We need to find economic uses for the smaller material that we need to remove from the forest to reduce the vulnerability to fire, insects, and disease.

*We recommend an increase in Forest and Rangeland Research of 5% over FY 2010 for research aimed at improving forest adaptability to changing climate, efficient resource use, and forest inventory and analysis.* We limit our request to 5% given the current economic situation. Frankly an increase in research of about \$90 million per year over the next five years is needed to provide a sound scientific foundation for the protection and management of our forests in the 21st century.

We want the Committee to know of our concerns about the serious decline in the number of career, peer-reviewed scientists in the Forest Service. In spite of relatively stable appropriations for research, the number of career scientists in the agency has declined from about 900 to just over 500. The agency has become increasingly dependant on short-term appointments and Post-Doc appointments. This decline affects the quality of the scientific work that is being done. It significantly reduces the ability of Forest Service Research to provide sound scientific advice to the agency, to the forest management community, and to the Congress. We urge the Committee to work with the agency to reverse this unfortunate trend.

### **State and Private Forestry**

We were disappointed to see the Administration propose reductions in funding for Forest Health Management. Given the catastrophic losses to bark beetles in the West and the threat of lethal invasive insect species throughout the country, we believe an increase in funding for this activity is warranted. *We recommend an increase of 3% over the 2010 appropriation for Forest Health Management on both Federal and Cooperative lands.*

We are also concerned about the proposed reduction in State Fire Assistance. The threat of fire on all ownerships is increasing. The cooperative relationships among federal land management agencies, state fire agencies, and local fire agencies are a model for emergency response. Reducing support for state and local agencies will adversely affect the nation's overall capacity for wildfire and other emergency responses. The States are simply in no position to pick up these costs. *We recommend no reduction in State Fire Assistance.*

The United Nations had designated 2011 as the Year of the Forests. Observances are planned throughout the world to call attention to the importance of forests to the quality of life. *We recommend increasing the appropriation for International Forestry by \$1 million to allow the Forest Service to participate with other nation's in this recognition.*

### **National Forest System**

The proposal to merge the Forest Products, Wildlife and Fisheries, and Vegetation and Watershed Management line items into a single line item will facilitate implementation of integrated management activities on the ground. When a Ranger receives funds in a number of discrete accounts, it is hard to match the money to the needs of a particular project. On the other hand, merging the line items will make it more difficult for people interested in particular activities to identify and track how their interests are being addressed. For example, the Budget Justification for 2011 shows only acres to be treated to restore watershed function or resilience. No data is shown that identify the nature of the work that will be done. There is no data for targets previously displayed such as the area of forest vegetation to be improved, the area of forest vegetation to be established, the area of rangeland vegetation to be improved, the area of stream improvements, or the area of noxious weeds and invasive plants to be treated. People and cooperators with interest in the various activities should be able to find out what the agency is proposing to do and then find out if they did it. If this proposal is accepted, it will be important for the agency and the Congress to fully display planned work and to carefully track and report on activities within the line item. A single broad description such as restoring watershed function provides no basis for judging the need, priority, cost, or otherwise assessing the validity of the proposal. For example, if the appropriation for the line item is based on preparing and selling a given volume of timber, the agency will need to track and report on accomplishments for this activity. *If the line items are merged, we suggest the combination be named Integrated Resource Management rather than Integrated Resource Restoration.* Restoration of forests and watersheds

to healthy conditions is important, but a significant amount of the work that is needed on our National Forests and Grasslands involves activities to maintain vegetation, watersheds and wildlife habitat in a healthy, sustainable condition.

We appreciate the emphasis the Congress has given to funding needed Hazardous Fuel Treatments. This work is critical to reducing the vulnerability of our forests to catastrophic fire losses, as well as the threat to lives and property in the wildland urban interface. We believe, however, that it will not be possible to get on top of the growing fuels problem by relying only on appropriated funds. If we are going to succeed, we must find ways to capture the economic value of the material that needs to be removed from the forest. Much of this material can be used for conventional wood products, for composite materials, and for energy production. Not all of the material will fully pay its way out of the woods today, but even if its removal must be subsidized, it will be cheaper to utilize it than to treat it in place. Importantly, utilization of this material will create jobs in local forest-dependent communities where unemployment rates are high. *We recommend an increase in the volume of timber to be prepared and offered for sale of 700 million board feet over that provided for FY2010.*

The Forest Service reports a backlog of lands needing reforestation of about one million acres. This is based on the results of on the ground examinations and prescriptions. Based on the rate that the backlog has been reduced in recent years, it will take nearly 20 years to eliminate it. We are concerned that the actual area needing reforestation may be significantly larger than reported. For example, a rapid assessment of the 2007 fires showed that some 500 thousand acres might need reforestation. The rapid assessment of the 2008 fires showed that potentially 227 thousand acres might need reforestation. On-the-ground stand examinations are needed to identify how much of this burned land should be added to the backlog. *We recommend a \$6 million increase in funding over that provided in 2010 for reforestation so that stand examinations can be completed and the agency and the Congress will have the data needed to develop a plan for increasing the reforestation program to a level that will eliminate the backlog within five years.*

The Administration proposes a small decrease in funding for Inventory and Monitoring. Inventory and monitoring are essential to professional management of forest resources and to insuring that activities meet established standards. Good information on the results of forest management activities is important to gaining and maintaining public support. *We urge that funding for Inventory and Monitoring be continued at not less than the 2010 level.*

The National Forests and Grasslands are neighbors to thousand of landowners and communities. Maintaining property lines, inspecting authorized uses, and responding promptly to requests for land uses and rights-of-way are essential to protecting the public property and to being a good neighbor. *We recommend an increase of \$5 million for Landownership Management.*

### **Capital Improvements and Maintenance**

We deplore the proposed reductions in funding for Capital Improvements and Facilities. We recognize that substantial funding for these activities was provided in the economic stimulus package, but large backlogs remain. If regular funding is reduced because of the economic stimulus funding, the benefits of the economic stimulus are lost. We particularly object to the reduction in funding for maintaining passenger car roads. The American people have a right to visit their National Forests and Grasslands. These roads are essential to recreation use that is important to the economies of local forest-dependant communities. They are important for the prompt initial attack on fires that is essential to controlling suppression costs. It has long been recognized that adequate access is essential to sustainable management and protection of forest

lands. One of the premises of the reduction in the timber program in the 1990's was that some of the employment losses would be made up by increases in recreation use. Recreation use on the National Forests is dependent on access by roads and trails. *We urge that funding for Capitol Improvements and Maintenance be continued at FY2010 levels.*

### **Wildland Fire Management**

In response to Congressional direction, the budget proposes rebalancing funding for Preparedness and Suppression. This rebalancing is desirable. We were disappointed that the Administration failed to fully implement Congressional direction in the FLAME Act. Funding for fire suppression (Fire Operation -Suppression and the FLAME Fund) is based on the 10-year average cost of suppression. *We recommend funding for fire suppression be based on the most recent 5-year average cost of suppression projected to 2011 as prescribed by the FLAME Act.* Establishing a third fund for suppression has no merit.

It is essential that the Forest Service has the capability to respond quickly with emergency watershed stabilization treatments following a wildfire. The flooding in Los Angeles following the Station Fire illustrates the importance of these funds. *We urge that funding of NFP - Rehabilitation and Restoration be continued at 2010 levels.*

Earlier we expressed our concerns about the proposed reductions in Forest Health and State Fire Assistance under State and Private Forestry. We have the same concerns about the reductions in these programs under the National Fire Plan. *We recommend an increase in funding for NFP-Forest Health of 3 percent. We recommend maintaining NFP-State Fire Assistance at the 2010 level;*

This Committee has been diligent in recognizing the special responsibility that the Congress has for the proper stewardship of our nation's forest lands and, particularly, the National Forests and Grasslands. We believe the recommendations set forth above will help to insure that this natural heritage will serve the people now and in the future.

Sincerely,



George M. Leonard  
Board of Directors  
National Association of Forest Service Retirees