



September 15, 2020

The Honorable Steve Daines
 United States Senate
 320 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
 United States Senate
 331 Hart Senate Office Building
 Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Daines and Feinstein,

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) writes to voice our support for the “*Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act of 2020.*” We applaud this bill and the bipartisan effort to streamline collaborative wildfire risk reduction projects and accelerate management near existing roads, trails, and transmission lines.

NASF represents the directors of the state forestry agencies in all 50 states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. By providing more than 270,000 technical assists to private landowners each year, and by directly managing 76 million acres of state-owned forestland, state foresters conserve, protect, and enhance more than two-thirds of all America’s forests and trees. State foresters and their agencies also work to improve the health, resilience, and productivity of federal lands through authorities like Good Neighbor Authority and provide wildfire protection on over 1.59 billion acres nationwide.

Forests across the United States need more active management. Active management is central to the health, productivity, and resiliency of all forests. Forest diseases and pests know no boundaries and easily spread across ownerships to negatively affect even the healthiest of forests. NASF applauds the bipartisan approach of the “*Emergency Wildfire and Public Safety Act*” to promote working across boundaries to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk.

The only way to protect the health and productivity of all of our nation’s forests is by managing them all to be more resilient. Greater forest management requires coordination among state and federal natural resource agencies, private forestland owners, and private and non-profit forestry organizations. The 75,000 acre collaborative wildfire risk reduction projects proposed in this bill would result in increased collaboration and active forest management in some of the areas that need it most, further enabling states to engage with federal agencies to get more work done. What is good for the forests in the West, is good for the forests in the rest of the country as well. NASF supports expanding section 101(5) in this bill to include all states, in order to benefit all of America’s forests.

NASF supports the 3,000-acre categorical exclusion proposed in this bill to accelerate management near existing roads, trails, and transmission lines. We feel such efforts to lower administrative

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costs and streamline processes and procedures are necessary, related to management near power lines, roads and trails in order to reduce wildfire risk to life and property. State foresters share in the Forest Service's responsibility for protecting and managing the Nation's forest resources. Since fire knows no boundaries this is a shared risk and we all benefit from reductions in risk.

For many decades, fire dependent landscapes have not been actively managed through mechanical harvesting and prescribed burning. The long-time exclusion of fire and lack of active management in these areas has contributed to overstocking; which means there are too many trees in a given area competing for limited resources. Overstocked forests are also vulnerable to drought, disease, and insects, and in turn, prone to even higher rates of tree mortality and large, difficult to control wildfires.

The complex interactions between federal legislation and rule-making and subsequent legal interpretation and federal agency analyses have limited active management significantly and resulted in unsustainable national forests. Forests like these that lack age class diversity do not provide adequate wildlife habitat and are prone to mass die-off as age classes reach the end of their lifespans. Over time, a lack of age class diversity and unbalanced age class distribution creates large blocks of dead and dying trees.

When markets are capable of accepting and processing all kinds of wood – including unprocessed dead and dying trees – federal land managers are empowered to remove undesirable growth that curbs forest productivity and fuels wildfires. As such, exempting the prohibition on the export of unprocessed timber and allowing for the export of unprocessed dead and dying trees would likely result in healthier forest landscapes across the West. NASF supports expanding section 301 of this bill, the exemption to prohibition on export of dead and dying trees, to be applied to all states.

NASF urges you to continue working in a bipartisan manner to find solutions and to deliver real change to the management of our federal forests. We stand ready to assist in supporting legislative solutions that bolster the social, economic, and ecological benefits of our nation's forests.

Sincerely,



Greg Josten
NASF President
South Dakota State Forester