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March 31, 2006

The Honorable Mark Udall
240 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-0602

Dear Representative Udall:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) representing over 15,000 professional forest managers, researchers, and educators is pleased with your recognition in HR 4875, the *Rocky Mountain Forest Insects Response Enhancement and Support (FIRES) Act*, of the need for timely action to recover forests after catastrophes such as the mountain pine beetle infestation in the Rocky Mountain region.

Annually, more than five million acres of forests burn in wildfires. In 2003, insects or disease severely impacted 12 million acres of forests up from more than six million in 2002. Additionally, in the past year, hurricanes have left a major footprint on forests in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida. In your home state of Colorado, thousands of acres of trees have been damaged by beetle outbreaks. When this occurs on this large of a scale, it causes immense damage to forests and the associated water, wildlife, recreation, timber and ascetic values. Catastrophic events will forever alter our forests, but we can bring them back with timely and thoughtful science-informed action.

SAF believes the *Rocky Mountain FIRES Act*, by authorizing a categorical exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act for projects addressing insect infestations in the Rocky Mountain region, could help with this issue on a small scale. Unfortunately, this legislation is narrowly focused on one type of catastrophe and one region of the country and therefore would not address the need for timely forest recovery on the national scale that is necessary. We urge you to support the *Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act* (HR 4200), which will address the problem in the Rocky Mountain region and would be helpful to other parts of the country facing similar forest catastrophes.

Again, we applaud your efforts to address this problem but urge you to consider expanding this concept to other forested areas and other forest catastrophes. Forest managers need the tools to act quickly in all regions of the country, not just the Rocky Mountains. The nation's forests, watersheds, and wildlife are too valuable to be left to chance. Now is the time for prompt action to protect our national treasure, our forests.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Marvin D. Brown
President