



February 5, 2009

The Honorable Jeff Bingaman
Chairman, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Bingaman:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF), representing all segments of forestry in the United States with over 14,000 members, strongly supports the Bingaman amendment to H.R. 1 providing additional funding for the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management for hazardous fuels reduction.

For almost a century, through federal and state forest fire protection efforts, wildfire has been purposely suppressed in many forests that are naturally adapted to periodic low-intensity wildfires. We now know this policy has had unintended and undesirable consequences, including increased stand density and overstocking. Because of lack of vigor, dense forests are highly susceptible to insects and diseases and, consequently, increased tree mortality. Excess tree mortality causes increased fuel loading, resulting in hazardous forest fire conditions that can put watersheds, wildlife habitat, and other forest values at risk. These conditions also increase fire suppression costs, make wildfire control more difficult and cause the release of tons of greenhouse gases and other pollutants into the atmosphere.

SAF finds that current funding levels on federal lands are insufficient to maintain forest health, meet the goals for hazardous fuel reduction to reduce wildfire risk, or provide economic and community benefits. The Bingaman Amendment would help to remedy this problem by funding much-needed hazardous fuels reduction projects. This provides immediate stimulus to the economy through the various jobs necessary to conduct this work, while also helping to 'get ahead' of the catastrophic wildfire problem on public lands.

Sincerely,

Michael Goergen
Executive Vice President and CEO