

Fiscal Year 2008 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Budget
Testimony by John P. McMahon, President
Society of American Foresters
House Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies
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The Society of American Foresters (SAF), with over 15,000 forestry professionals across the country in all segments of the profession, believes in sound management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests. Funding for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the USDA Forest Service (USFS), both contained in the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, are particularly important to maintaining and improving the nation's forests.

The 749 million acres of forests in the U.S. are undergoing tremendous pressures from wildfires and other catastrophic events, insects, disease, invasive species, rising land prices, and other events. At the same time, people are relying more and more on forests for clean water and air, recreational opportunities, hunting, fishing, forest products, and scenic values. Unfortunately, the federal budgets to combat these pressures continue to decline, in part due to the increasing cost of wildfire suppression, which forces the agencies to cut other important activities in this budget climate of limited resources.

SAF remains deeply concerned about these issues and the overall sustainability of the nation's forests. Forest sustainability implies a balance and interdependence of the social, environmental, and economic values from forests, a balance that we believe is currently uneven in many parts of the country, due to overlapping and sometimes contradicting laws and regulations that do not recognize the need for balance among these issues.

To help address these pressures and improve the overall sustainability of the nation's forests, SAF urges a focus on three key funding areas and the range of programs within the DOI and USFS budget that address these key issues (as outlined in the chart below). SAF's key priorities are:

- ? **Forest Health on both public and private forestlands**
- ? **Forest Research and Inventory**
- ? **Family Forest Management**

Forest Health

Today, over 190 million acres of federal forests and over 90 million acres of non federal forests are threatened by wildfires, insects, diseases, invasive species and other factors. Sound management of both public and private forests is needed to get ahead of these threats and restore forest health and resiliency. *To address these issues, SAF urges increased resources over the FY 2008 proposed budget for USFS forest health programs and wildland fire accounts in both the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior, as outlined in the chart below.*

Wildfire Suppression--SAF remains deeply concerned over the rising costs of wildfire suppression efforts. Unfortunately, these increasing costs will most likely continue due to the unhealthy state of the nation's federal forests, the increasing movement into the wildland-urban interface, and the prolonged drought affecting many areas in the west.

Two issues concerning the funding of fire suppression, both related to the use of the previous ten-year's average for allocating funds, are of immediate importance to SAF:

First, if agencies spend more than the year's appropriated funding level for fire suppression, they are required to borrow from other accounts to pay for continued firefighting efforts. Even if these funds are paid back through supplemental appropriations, which is often not the case, the time delay can cause serious disruptions to the programs whose accounts have been impacted.

Second, given the increase in both the number and size of wildfires, fire suppression costs are increasing dramatically. Considering that agencies must operate within fixed budget caps, that they are required to allocate for fire suppression at the 10-year average, and that this average is increasing rapidly, the agencies, especially the Forest Service, are compelled to transfer an ever-increasing amount of funds to fire suppression at the expense of other programs. In the past 18 years, the wildfire management portion of the agency's budget has gone from 13 percent to 45 percent. This is perhaps the most serious single problem facing the ability of the Forest Service to maintain its nonfire-related programs.

Congress must address these two related issues if the Forest Service is to remain a viable land management agency. The second concern, in particular, has grown to a magnitude that must be resolved now before significant impact occurs in other programs which have continued to be reduced as a consequence. At the same time, we strongly urge the agencies to continue to adopt cost-containment measures and accountability in wildfire suppression budgeting.

Reducing Hazardous Fuels--USFS and DOI hazardous fuels reduction efforts are critical if we are to restore forest health and resilience and reduce the cost of suppressing wildfires over the long-term. Efforts by the agencies to treat acres should be prioritized to focus on condition class 3 lands, restoring fire regimes, and protecting communities and community infrastructure and attributes. ***SAF supports the fiscal year 2007 enacted levels for hazardous fuels accounts within both the USFS and the DOI at or above fiscal year 2007 levels. Additionally, other efforts such as timber sales and the vegetation and watershed management program can help address heavy fuel loads and should be funded at least at FY 2007 levels.***

Woody Biomass Utilization--In this climate of tight budgets for federal land management and the rising costs of owning and managing private lands, market opportunities for woody biomass can provide the necessary income for addressing forest management goals. Woody biomass markets create venues for utilization of small diameter and other materials that currently have little value, allowing managers to cover costs of hazardous

fuels reduction and insect treatments, maintenance or restoration of wildlife habitat, and other beneficial activities. ***We strongly encourage \$10 million for woody biomass utilization grants within the USFS hazardous fuels account and urge that these funds be used for projects on both federal and non federal lands.***

Forest Research and Inventory

Investments in forestry research are investments in the future health and sustainability of the nation's forests. The nation's forestry research is conducted by a number of entities, including federal agencies, universities, and private industry, with the majority of federal funding focused in the USDA Forest Service, Research and Development program. USFS R&D conducts essential research on current issues such as climate change, management of old growth forest ecosystems, treatment methods for controlling forest insects, diseases, and invasive species, renewable energy development and woody biomass conversion technology, and forest products research to help maintain the competitiveness of the US forest products industry. At a time when society is relying more than ever on forests, forestry research capacity in the US continues to decline, threatening US competitiveness and the ability of forest managers to meet tomorrow's challenges with the most up to date science and technical information. ***SAF urges a funding level of \$280 million for the USFS Research and Development program, with particular emphasis on prioritizing research efforts and transferring knowledge to forestry professionals working in the field.***

Forest Inventory and Analysis--The USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis program is the backbone of forestry knowledge in the US, providing the only national census of forests across all ownerships. Unfortunately, the FIA program has yet to become a truly national program, with 4 states yet to be included in the program. Through FIA, the USFS, partnering with state forestry agencies and the private sector, collects and analyzes forest data to assess trends on issues such as forest health and management, fragmentation and parcelization, and forest carbon sequestration. FIA also produces the only comprehensive national survey of the nation's 10 million private forest owners, providing data on trends in private land ownership. ***We strongly urge Congress to fully fund the FIA program at \$73.3 million in FY 2008 to complete full coverage of a nationally consistent program in all states.***

Family Forest Management

Family-owned forests, comprising over 260 million acres and owned by over 10 million landowners, are undergoing tremendous pressures as land prices rise, forest health concerns escalate, and markets for forest products shift overseas. These forests provide many public benefits including the majority of endangered species forested habitat, a large portion of the nation's wood supply, and excellent places to hunt, fish, and recreate. Programs within the USFS State and Private Forestry area help these landowners, through partnerships with the states, hold on to their land and manage it for a variety of purposes. In particular, we are deeply concerned with the Administration's proposed cuts to the Forest Stewardship Program, a program designed to reach family forest owners directly to help them make informed decisions about their land. We are encouraged with the new prioritization and strategic direction of this program and believe

the program is making more efficient use of its limited resources. *We urge Congress to reject this proposal and fund the Forest Stewardship Program at \$45 million, a \$10 million increase over the fiscal year 2007 level.*

USDA Forest Service

Discretionary Appropriations (dollars in millions)	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Proposed	FY 2008 SAF Recommendation
Forest and Rangeland Research[a]	277.7	263.0	280.0
Forest Inventory and Analysis Total	64.0	62.3	73.4
FIA funding in R&D	59.4	62.3	68.4
S&PF Forest	4.6	0.0	5.0
State and Private Forestry Total			
Forest Health Management-Federal	53.2	53.0	57.0
Forest Health Management-Cooperative	47.0	38.1	53.0
State Fire Assistance	32.9	33.1	35.0
Volunteer Fire Assistance	5.9	9.0	9.0
Forest Stewardship Program	34.1	20.0	45.0
Forest Legacy Program	56.5	29.3	65.0
Urban and Community Forestry	26.8	17.4	28.5
Economic Action Programs	9.5	0.0	10.0
International Forestry	6.9	2.5	7.0
National Forest System Total	1445.6		
Land Management Planning	57.7	52.6	57.7
Inventory and Monitoring	166.6	146.5	166.6
Recreation, Wilderness & Heritage	258.8	231.4	258.8
Forest Products	318.6	318.6	318.6
Vegetation and Watershed Management	154.3	154.3	154.3
Wildland Firefighters [b]	NA	219.7	
Wildland Fire Management Total	1816.1		
Preparedness	660.7	349.1[c]	568.8
Fire Operations	741.5	911.0	911.0
Hazardous Fuels	298.8	291.5	298.8
Rehabilitation and Restoration	6.2	0.0	7.0
Fire Research and Development	22.8	22.0	22.8
Joint Fire Sciences Program	7.9	8.0	8.0
Forest Health Management – Federal	14.8	14.3	16.0
Forest Health Management - Cooperative	9.9	10.0	13.0
State Fire Assistance	45.8	35.0	45.8
Volunteer Fire Assistance	7.8	8.0	8.0
Capital Improvement and Maintenance Total			

Facilities	123.7	119.6	119.6
Roads	220.7	227.4	227.4
Deferred Maintenance	12.7	9.1	9.1
Land Acquisition	41.8	17.0	30.0

[a] this figure includes FIA which is also broken out below.

[b] new account, shifts funds from fire preparedness

[c] proposal shifts \$219.7 million to wildland firefighter account

US Department of the Interior

Program (dollars in millions)	FY 2007 Enacted	FY 2008 Proposed	FY 2008 SAF Recommendation
DOI Wildland Fire Management Total	769.6	801.8	813.8
Suppression	257.0	294.4	294.4
Preparedness	274.8	268.3	268.3
Hazardous Fuels	199.8	202.8	202.8
State and Local Fire Assistance	0	0.0	10.0
Joint Fire Science	5.9	4.0	6.0
BLM Public Domain Forest Management	10.5	10.7	10.7
BLM OR and CA Grant Lands Total	112.4	110.2	112.4