



January 11, 2010

The Honorable Mark Udall
317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James E. Risch
483 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Udall and Risch:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF), the scientific, educational and professional organization devoted to the sustainable and science-based management of our forests for the benefit of society, strongly supports S. 2798, the National Forest Insect and Disease Emergency Act of 2009. On behalf of our 14,000 members, we thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

As millions of acres of forests across the western United States are infested, dead and dying of mountain pine beetle and other insects and diseases, a great deal of work will be needed to remove dead and dying trees to protect public safety, roads, trails, power lines, watersheds and protect communities from catastrophic wildfire. Further, by preventing uncharacteristically hot wildfires, we can encourage the establishment of a new forest by protecting forest seed sources, preventing cooked soils and other damage that hinders or prohibits forest regeneration.

Given current federal land management laws, regulations and case law, there is virtually no way this work can be done in a timely manner. In fact, the Forest Service will only be able to address the direst of needs even if unlimited funding were devoted to this problem. S. 2798 will greatly aid the Forest Service by reducing the amount of time and resources needed to plan and implement projects to protect life, property and other important forest values.

We commend you for the simple, common sense approach of this bill, but also have some recommendations. First, we ask that you extend the authorities and designation in the bill to include Bureau of Land Management (BLM/public lands) lands. Across the west, many national forests are intermixed with BLM land and treating both land ownerships is critical (for example, 22% of Colorado's forestland is managed by the BLM). Second, we ask that you work to ensure appropriate funding of this legislation and we stand ready to help in this endeavor. Finally, we also ask that some focus be placed on green forests that have not yet been infested to prevent mortality from bark beetles. Published scientific and case studies have shown that in some forests, if aggressive thinning to a prescribed density is completed, the forest can survive attacks from bark beetles. This will be important to protecting existing habitat and other forest values for the future as a diverse, multi-aged forest is much more resilient than the even-aged forests we see today.

Again, we thank you for your leadership and strongly support S. 2798.

Sincerely,

Michael B. Lester, CF
President, SAF

