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On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters

Before the House of Representatives
Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

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Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee. On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters, I am pleased to have the opportunity to testify before you today on the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act. NASF is a non-profit organization that represents the directors of the state forestry agencies from the states, U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. State Foresters restore, manage, and protect state and private forests across the U.S., which together encompass two-thirds of our nation's forests.

The National Association of State Foresters is pleased to support the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act. Every year, in every part of the United States, forest catastrophes rob society of the clean water, wildlife habitat, wood fiber, beautiful scenery, and many other important values that these lands would otherwise provide. Repairing lands that have been ravaged by fire, hurricanes, ice storms, and other disasters has to occur as quickly as possible if these losses are to be avoided. This bill offers improvements that will speed the implementation of recovery projects following such events and authorizes badly needed research in support of these efforts.

We are very encouraged to see language in the bill recognizing that these events can occur across large-scale landscapes, and that the ensuing restoration work needs to be coordinated across all involved ownerships. It is of particular concern to State Foresters that too often the lack of recovery work on federal lands creates additional threats for adjoining state and private lands, all of which have been impacted by the same disaster. The inclusion of landscape assessment efforts across all ownerships, as well as a focus on the preparation of Community Wildfire Protection Plans, will provide needed emphasis on restoration and protection for all lands.

I would like to point out just a few examples of how we have to deal with forest recovery treatments at a landscape level if we are going to be responsible caretakers for the nation's overall sustainable forest resource.

In June of 2002, the Grizzly Gulch Fire in the Black Hills of South Dakota burned nearly 12,000 acres, the majority of which was on private land. The fire caused severe disturbance to the watershed above the city of Deadwood, which later resulted in flooding and damage to private property in Deadwood, following two heavy rain events. In response to this catastrophic disturbance to the forest, the South Dakota Division of Resource Conservation and Forestry worked with private forest landowners to carry out 143 acres of contour felling and 102 acres of aerial re-seeding on the worst of the severely burned areas. In addition, funds from the Emergency Watershed Program under NRCS were used to remove debris from the streams flowing through Deadwood and to build barriers to divert floodwaters. State Forestry personnel provided technical assistance to private forest landowners for the purposes of tree survivability estimates, hazard tree identification, insect and disease identification and control, erosion control, noxious weed control, and replanting of native trees and grasses. Salvage efforts were coordinated closely with the local forest products industry, which helped to implement innovative techniques, such as roller chopping, to reduce soil erosion in salvaged areas. Heavy rains following the rehabilitation and restoration work did not cause flooding or damage.

When an ice storm causes widespread damage to trees, the affected region frequently sees a buildup in harmful insect populations and forest disease when pathogens find weakened, ice-broken hosts that are primed for invasion. If any particular landowner is slow to bring their forest back to a healthy condition, their land becomes the center for this buildup. Eventually the insects and pathogens will move from the concentration around damaged, un-restored forests and on to surrounding healthy forests. Landowners who worked diligently to restore their lands will be harmed by the lack of action on the part of their neighbors. We are concerned that the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management, through their inability to act quickly, are contributing to this problem.

At this very moment in the southern United States, there is a growing danger of catastrophic fire due to the huge volumes of downed woody material left in the wake of hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma. Any landowner who is unable or unwilling to move quickly to get these ravaged lands cleaned up is contributing to this risk. And once the fire starts on federal land, or private land, or whatever ownership may be tardy in dealing with recovery, the flames know no boundary.

On September 5 th, 1996, Hurricane Fran made landfall along the southern coast of North Carolina, carving out a large swath of destruction across the state. Severe flooding, along with nearly \$1 billion in timber losses, faced many private forest landowners. In response to this catastrophic disturbance, the State of North Carolina provided \$5 million to the North Carolina Division of Forest Resources to help private landowners reforest their lands, and an additional \$5 million for wildfire mitigation and suppression. Following Hurricanes Frances and Ivan in 2004, which caused widespread destruction to forests in the western mountains of the state, we received \$500,000 in state funding to assist private landowners with reforestation. These funds helped to quickly reforest 4,000 acres. Our successful recovery and reforestation efforts on private land in North Carolina should serve as a model and a goal for the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management for their similar efforts on federal lands.

For a number of years now federal lands in the western United States have experienced an increasing number of very large fires. Only a small percentage of these lands have received treatments to restore and revegetate the burned forestland effectively. In this case, the lands are characterized by large volumes of dead wood and large expanses of highly volatile brush that persist for many years. The likelihood of a re-burn in these areas – often as difficult to control as the original fire – is very high. Accompanying this high likelihood of yet another catastrophic fire is, again, the attendant risk to any adjacent landowner.

For the Forest Service and BLM to act like responsible neighbors and perform as good stewards over the large estate of federally owned lands in the US, they need to be able to deal with these disasters quickly and effectively. In recognition of the fact that these catastrophes do not stop at any single boundary line, we need to be able to deal with restoration issues across the various levels of government. Acknowledging that the body of scientific research available on the subject of forest recovery after major catastrophes is limited, we need to better capitalize on the learning opportunities that may present themselves when such disasters occur.

While federal forest managers are often constrained by process and regulations, state and private forest managers are often constrained by funding availability. The ability to move quickly to treat private lands is virtually useless if adequate funding is not available. State Foresters are pleased to see several funding sources addressed in the bill. Of particular interest is the ability of the Secretary to use FEMA funding in federally declared disaster areas to restore forests on non-federal lands.

We appreciate the measures that are being proposed in this legislation and look forward to helping in whatever way we can to promote its passage. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.