



American Forest Foundation

National Association of State Foresters and the American Forest Foundation Applaud Introduction of Empowering State Forestry to Improve Forest Health Act of 2018
Bipartisan Bill to Prioritize Forest Landscape-Scale Projects Across Both Private and Public Land

WASHINGTON, Feb. 8, 2018 —Yesterday, the American Forest Foundation and the National Association of State Foresters offered their support for Empowering State Forestry to Improve Forest Health Act of 2018, a bill introduced by Representatives Peter Welch (D-VT) and Glenn Thompson (R-PA). This bipartisan legislation would direct funding toward the highest priority forest conservation projects, resulting in measurable improvements to private and family-owned forests and nearby National Forest System lands.

“This legislation represents a positive change in the tide when it comes to national forest management,” said George Geissler, president of NASF and Oklahoma state forester. “With it, statewide Forest Action Plans—the nation’s roadmap for prioritizing and targeting limited resources for the greatest benefit—would guide more regional and country-wide forest management decisions. This legislation will also help protect American communities by focusing a portion of USDA Forest Service fuels management funding on cross-boundary work in coordination with state foresters.”

“After a year where our forest challenges—catastrophic wildfires, insect infestations and more—seemed to grow in size and scope, we applaud Representatives Welch and Thompson for their leadership in championing smart policy solutions that will encourage a more landscape-level approach resulting in a greater positive impact on our forests,” said Tom Martin, president and CEO of AFF. “Families and individuals own more than one-third of the forests across the U.S., intermixed with both state and federal forest. We must work across these boundary lines to address the problems that spread beyond them if we are to be successful.”

The bill, which has a Senate companion (S.962), builds on an existing program that

was created to enhance the on-the-ground outcomes delivered through the USDA Forest Service Cooperative Forestry Programs. The bill codifies the program and adds a requirement that state Forest Action Plans be the basis for project selection.

In addition, the bill directs a portion of the USDA Forest Service Hazardous Fuels Program to cross-boundary work including thinning trees and using prescribed burns, in order to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire. Together with the Forest Service, state foresters would select those projects and be able to spend a portion of that funding on fuels reduction on adjoining state, county, and private lands.

The Empowering State Forestry to Improve Forest Health Act of 2018 would:

- Authorize a new USDA Forest Service program which codifies an existing approach the agency is pursuing to support landscape restoration;
- Direct resources toward the highest priority forestry projects as identified each state forestry agency's Forest Action Plan;
- Direct the USDA Forest Service and the Department of the Interior to spend a portion of the Hazardous Fuels Reduction Program resources on projects that include work across public and private lands;
- Bolster the use of the Farm Bill's Good Neighbor Authority; and much more.

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The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) represents state and territorial forester interests by influencing forest policy and leading efforts to optimize social, economic, and environmental benefits of trees and forests. Learn more at www.stateforesters.org and www.forestationplans.org.

The American Forest Foundation (AFF), a forest conservation organization, works on the ground with families, teachers and elected officials to promote stewardship and protect our nation's forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners and teachers working to keep our forests healthy and our children well-prepared for the future they will inherit. Learn more at www.forestfoundation.org.