



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS
444 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite 540, Washington, DC 20001

August 12, 2003

The Honorable Pete Domenici
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Max Baucus
 United States Senate
 Washington, DC 20510

2003
 Executive
 Committee

Dear Senators:

President
 James L. Sledge
 Mississippi

On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters (NASF), I wish to express our strong support for your introduction and sponsorship of the National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003 (S.1454). The provisions in the bill will do much for this nation's ability to muster a coordinated drought response and to assist states in preparing for and quickly responding to wildfire threats.

Vice President
 Burnell C. Fischer
 Indiana

Drought has significant influence in the severity of wildfire risk and the effectiveness of states' response to wildfires. Drought is influencing the wildfires burning in the inland West this season, and it was a significant factor in the fires of 2000 and 2002. Even with a 98% success rate in suppressing fires while they are small, the 2% and fewer fires that escape are costing the nation dearly in suppression resources and particularly in loss of life and property.

Treasurer
 Pat McElroy
 Washington

*Northeastern
 Representative*
 Gene L. Francisco
 Wisconsin

State and local fire departments are typically the first responders to a wildland fire. If wildfires can be caught while small, then suppression funds, property and lives can be saved. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Enabling the staging and pre-positioning of resources, through reimbursement of these costs, will allow states and local governments to more effectively prepare for, prevent and mitigate the impacts of drought and associated wildfire across the nation. Having a fire truck, bulldozer or aircraft at the right place and the right time allows firefighters to get a jump on wildfires before they spread. Small investments up front provide for significant savings in wildfire suppression costs down the line. Title II of the National Drought Preparedness Act addresses this critical need.

*Western
 Representative*
 James E. Hubbard
 Colorado

*Southern
 Representative*
 Timothy C. Boyce
 Alabama

*Immediate
 Past President*
 Larry A. Kotchman
 North Dakota

Executive Director
 Anne E. Heissenbuttel

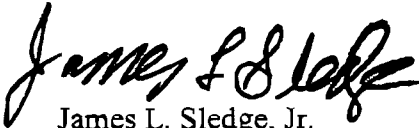
Approximately 123,000 fires burned more than 8.4 million acres in 2000. More than \$2 billion from federal accounts was spent suppressing the fires, and this does not include State and local firefighting suppression costs, direct and indirect economic losses to communities, loss of property, and damage to ecosystems. The 2002 wildfire season proved to be another devastating season, costing over \$1.6 billion to suppress and scorching over 7.1 million acres across the country. We must continue to expect and prepare for the worst in future wildfire seasons, as long term weather forecasts, combined with the health and condition of our forests, mean the stage is set for larger and more devastating wildfires.

Drought Bill Letter
Senators Domenici & Baucus
8/12/2003
Page 2

The National Drought Preparedness Act of 2003, with its emphasis on pre-positioning for wildfire in Title II, will go a long way in supporting the goals of the 10-year Comprehensive Wildfire Strategy and Implementation Plan and reducing the financial and resource losses from wildfire. The simple truth is that federal reimbursement of State and local pre-positioning of wildfire resources is cost effective by helping to prevent potential disasters. On behalf of the National Association of State Foresters, I thank you for your sponsorship of S. 1454, and we urge all legislators to support and help pass the bill.

Please do not hesitate to contact Anne Heissenbittel, NASF Executive Director, at our Washington office (202-624-5415) to let us know how we can assist in its passage.

Sincerely,



James L. Sledge, Jr.
President

CC: The Honorable Alcee L. Hastings
The Honorable Dennis Rehberg
Paul Orbuch, Western Governors Association