



May 19, 2003

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The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Hastert:

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) supports the *Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003* (HR 1904) as a step forward in legislative efforts aimed at improving the health and conditions of both public and private forest lands. Serious problems of insect and disease outbreaks, catastrophic wildfire, and invasive species, are reducing the health of forests across the country. Professional forest managers need to be able to act now to address these issues, and the ecological, social, and economic conditions associated with them.

In 2002, wildfires burned over 6.9 million acres, costing \$1.6 billion in suppression costs alone, and burning over 800 structures. In addition to wildfire, insects and disease have ravaged millions of forested acres across the country. Invasive species have become one of the largest threats to imperiled species, second only to habitat loss.

When it comes to our national forests and public lands, we, as a nation, must be proactive. We must develop a workable process through which much needed forest management can be implemented in a timely manner to ameliorate the severe forest health issues that have been mounting for the past several decades. *The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003* (HR 1904) works toward the development of such a process. It will assist forest managers in their efforts to restore fire to fire-adapted ecosystems and mitigate insect and disease outbreaks using scientific and experienced based management tools.

HR 1904 is not just for public lands. In addition to the tools for mitigating the damage to forests from wildfire, insects, and disease, the bill would also assist in the protection of endangered species habitat on private land, through incentives in addition to current regulations. HR 1904 would also provide state foresters with needed tools to better manage watersheds across ownership boundaries.

While this bill does provide solutions to forest health issues, there is a need for long-term solutions to these problems, so professional forest managers can move forward in their roles as stewards of both public and private forest lands.

The SAF encourages the House and the Senate to act now to address these issues. We look forward to working with Congress throughout the deliberations on this bill, and in future negotiations, to ensure it functions as its authors and supporters intend.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Goergen, Jr.  
Interim Executive Vice-President

Cc: The Honorable Richard Pombo  
The Honorable Scott McInnis