



NATIONAL WILDFIRE INSTITUTE

Supporting Healthy Forests That Resist Catastrophic Fire

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Todd Willens
Assistant Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW - MIB Room 6116
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Todd:

We talked some time ago about our Institute drafting a vision and Executive Order on the importance of effective management of our nation's lands before we lose a critical heritage due to fire and neglect.

The President and both the Agriculture and Interior Secretaries have made profound statements attesting to the need for assertive management of our forests, parks, grasslands and watersheds. We include several quotes here that caught our attention.

President Trump said, "Our shared National Parks, forests and other public lands are the country's common ground, representing an opportunity to come together in the name of a cherished ideal, regardless of political party.

Secretary Zinke said, "This administration will take a serious turn from the past and will proactively work to prevent forest fires through aggressive and scientific fuels reduction management to save lives, homes, and wildlife habitat."

Secretary Purdue said, "We must treat our forests so that we are not spending more on fighting fires than we are on making sure that our forests are healthy."

We have spent considerable effort to reflect the desires of our leaders in drafting the attached vision, and Executive Order, and feel that, if accepted, would give strong direction to those working on and for our nation's resource areas. We have not shared this work beyond our Institute and will not until both Secretaries have had a chance to see if they want to use it, or modify it.

We would be glad to set up a teleconference to clarify or respond to questions about our vision and draft Executive Order.

We are aware of numerous bills in Congress, but also see major differences between the Senate and House of Representatives in their approaches. We fear that once again the opportunity may slip by to pass meaningful legislation. After the last fire season and the terrible mud slides emanating from them, we must act to get our resources areas under control. This must begin soon or other priorities will take the forefront.

Todd, we now have a great opportunity to move forward with this vision or a modified one. The Nation is still reeling from the recent disasters, and will respond if we put forth a compelling plan to “Make Our Resource Areas Great Again.”

I’m hoping that you can review these products with Mr. Zinke, and see if they would fit his vision. We will do the same with Mr. Purdue. Thanks for being willing to take a look at our drafts!

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Courtright". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end.

Bruce Courtright, Board Chair

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America's Natural Resources Vision For 2025¹

Foreword. The United States of America is moving through a very challenging time, with political uncertainty, shifting environmental conditions, and economic challenges. The commitment of a wide-range of conservation leaders in the realm of natural resources stewardship is creating a positive outlook to the challenges faced now and ahead. With a clear contemporary vision that will address the management, protection and wise use of America's natural resources along a complex rural to urban land gradient, significant progress ensuring environmental health and community stability will emerge.

By 2025, we see a critically different narrative for effective land stewardship. We envision the following to help meet the natural resources conservation demands just ahead.

Forest Resources. Forest resources that are utilized at a sustainable level to enable economic prosperity. This level of management is well within the growth potential of the land while accommodating historic levels of "natural disturbance" that once drove effective rejuvenation processes. The well-intended policies found in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) habitat retention, minor sediment disturbance requirements of the Clean Water Act, and prescribed fire smoke restrictions, as examples, are not respectful of the dynamic forested ecosystem; they temporarily attempt to hold nature static in time. This method of management may meet the current policies and laws, but when nature exerts an overwhelming need to rebalance the system, the results of wide spread disease and catastrophic fire effects are uncharacteristically outside the normal range of ecosystem functions due to man's short-term intervention.

The harvesting of trees for wood products coupled with fuel reduction for prescribed fire on both public and private lands must become much closer to mimicking the natural processes to ensure forested ecosystems are healthy, sustainable and more resilient to disturbances. A broad range of forest stand ages, ecologically known as "seral stages", must be maintained across landscapes to enhance biodiversity, increase multiple uses and their benefits -- while strengthening of rural economies. Aggressive forest management, including the targeted removal of hazardous fuels, is the most effective way to modify large fire behavior and return fire to its natural role on the land. The desired future condition is met by reducing the number, duration and size of catastrophic fires, and burned forests are returned to productivity by quickly salvaging usable wood products, closely followed by reforestation. Proactive forest management using this technique produces sustainable products and enable innovative, cost-effective market-based solutions from these well-managed forests.

Partnerships. Local governments, public agencies and private natural resource management organizations alongside proactive conservation groups, are the basis of a strong coalition for contemporary land stewardship. This partnership is included in all local land management planning efforts, leading to increased resource utilization by, avoiding duplication and achieving greater efficiency. Communities have a stronger involvement in natural resources management efforts and are committed to success.

¹ Compiled by Michael T. Rains on behalf of the National Wildfire Institute (revised), January 10, 2018.

Recreation. Recreation on forestlands is a key to helping improve people's lives and their communities. People view our forests as a place to enjoy and recoup. The quality of trails, lakes and complete landscapes are a basis of national pride. Others closely observe the quality of conservation that is given to the lands and are guided by America's level of excellence and public acceptance. Funding from all sources is increased due to the support and enhanced value of recreation areas. Reducing the loss of forested cover from disturbances like high intensity fires and insect and diseases through well-planned forest management actions will enhance recreation values.

Research and Technology Development. Research, and the sharing of leading-edge technologies, increases the value and profitability of both public and private lands. Readily used applications are developed in partnership with a wide-range of users and science-based organizations. Priority discovery is given to actions that will directly benefit the environment, multiple use conservation and the profitability of the end users and all science is in concert with the agency missions. New innovations in biomass uses, such as the expanded use of cellulose nanomaterials and advanced wood-composites for construction materials help achieve full biomass utilization and accelerated economic expansion in a wide-range of products and services throughout the country.

Water. Clean water and adequate supply are once again available to all users due to excellent and aggressive stewardship of our Nation's lands. Managing our landscapes for increased snow retention and groundwater recharge is critical to provide the necessary water for our growing populations and fisheries, especially in the west. Water-based recreation is both profitable to land managers and is used at a level never before attained. The innovative management of our forests allows for clean water that is available to meet the priority demands for a growing America.

Wildlife. Our Nation's forests and grasslands are healthy, sustainable and provide abundant, high quality habitat for wildlife. Wildlife diversity is expanded and sustained. Through the use of modern mapping tools, these dynamic ecosystems can be managed for all habitats in sufficient quantities and quality to protect and enhance all species, including those listed under the ESA. Due to sound planning and a high-level of local involvement, a consensus is achieved in determining the balance of services provided by the lands across all ownerships.

Rural Communities. Increased employment in rural areas is significantly improved due to better resource management. Twenty-five percent tax receipts, now at record low levels, are increased so local jurisdictions are better able to provide basic services for their citizens and our children. These include safe roads and schools as two primary immediate recipients. Personal income is up and stagnated economies dependent on government subsidies finally begin to recover. Advice and leadership from a wide-range of state and local partners is valued and sought. Local resource users positively comment on the high quality of services provided by government entities, pointing to a wide-range of land condition enhancements. Funding is effectively used to maximize the outputs of planned forest management projects.

Fire. Aggressive forest management becomes the critical link to effective fire management. Increased timber harvesting, including increased removals of hazardous fuel, along with new innovations in biomass uses and fire control technology will enable wildland fire to become an effective land restoration tool. Well-planned prescribed fires are conducted by skilled fire managers and the cooperation and coordination between all federal, state, local personnel involved is always cohesive and the basis of success.

DONALD J. TRUMP

XLV President of the United States: 2018 - present

Executive Order xxxxx – A Comprehensive Strategy to Ensure Healthy, Sustainable and More Resilient Forests²

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, it is hereby ordered as follows:

Section 1. Findings. The United States, especially its rural communities, depends on the productivity, health and sustainability of forestlands as a primary economic driver of local economies. These lands cover about 885 million acres across America. Many of these forestlands are highly concentrated in the western half of our nation where public lands compose a preponderance of the county taxable land base. Public lands provide the interface for many rural and urban communities designated and published by federal and state agencies as “Communities at Risk” from wildfire. In the last twenty years, especially, America’s forestlands have come under attack by fire and disease. About one-half of all forestlands, about 400 million acres, require some type of restorative action. The public and private forestlands across our country were designated to offer a wide-range of ecological and commercial goods and services for a growing America, including but not limited to clear air and water; timber and associated wood products; wildlife habitat; tourism; recreation; flood control; carbon storage; and, through proactive management receipts that provide financial support for federal lands that cannot be taxed for local government services. The harvesting of trees for wood products on both public and private lands must be at a much higher level than current to ensure forested ecosystems are healthy, sustainable and more resilient to disturbances. A broad range of forest stand ages maintained across landscapes enhance landscape biodiversity critical to wildlife species survival and is fundamental to community stability and economic prosperity, especially in rural areas. Aggressive forest management improves wildland fire management containment strategies, thereby reducing catastrophic fires and protecting lives, clean water, clean air, wildlife, recreation and adjacent private property. Infrastructure investments that promote expansion of cost-effective market based solutions for a wide-range of biomass uses that include traditional forest products, new innovations in wood-based nanotechnology and building construction using advanced composites are key to ensuring America’s forests continue to be well-managed in balance

² Compiled by Michael T. Rains on behalf of the National Wildfire Institute.

with environmental, social and economic concerns, now and for the future.

Section 2. Wildfire Paradox. In part, because our country does not have a cohesive and comprehensive forest management strategy, a “wildfire paradox” has surfaced. That is, decades-long aggressive fire suppression, effective 95-98 percent of the time, can lead to future wildfires with higher severities and without adequate reforestation, convert forests to brush fields where vegetation now drives shorter return intervals with higher severity fire events. Rapidly spreading brush fires laden with heavy downed log debris untreated from recent fire events cause future fires to be even larger and more difficult to control, a much higher public safety risk to local communities and the public at large due to repeated hazardous smoke exposure. From a long-term perspective, the USDA Forest Service and others engaged in wildland fire suppression are working at cross purposes. Without an aggressive forest management strategy, we are trapped in a reactive fire suppression campaign that is endless and cannot be sustained financially. More money and more resources spent on each fire event will never keep pace with the vegetative fuel growth on our public lands. Investing strategically through active forest management, while using those funds generated from accomplishing that work, is both effective and a logical business practice proven to limit and control the spread of fires prior to ignition. A national, cohesive and comprehensive forest management strategy will reduce the increasing hazardous fuel loading on fire prone public and private landscapes throughout America. The reduction of hazardous fuel is accomplished by an aggressive forest management strategy of increased timber and other forest product harvesting, salvage logging after a wildfire, and extensive application of pre-approved and planned prescribed fire. These measures will create restored landscapes that are resilient to wildfires and protect fire adapted communities within the expanding wildland-urban interface. Additional forest management funding will be required until fire suppression costs can be significantly reduced and overall funds can be redirected in a more balanced, land conservation strategy. In the short-term, some of the new investments to support accelerated forest management programs will be offset by the revenues generated through the goods and services provided by the improved utilization of natural resources. Even in the short-term, an aggressive forest management strategy will reduce the costs to control wildland fires and the restoration of related damages. To be clear, the current practices in wildland fire, influenced at times by conflicting laws, congressional intent, and even executive direction, have led to an untenable and unstable situation. Change must happen. The "status quo" cannot succeed as it continues to deforest our nations forests at

unprecedented rates.

Sec. 3. Overall Vision. To effectively develop a cohesive management strategy for America's forests, a long-term vision must be crafted. The current policies on our Nation's forests were developed in the 1960-70's. To put that into perspective, the science of Forest Ecology taught in our most prestigious universities today did not exist at that time.

Fundamentally, many laws associated with multiple-use conservation are antiquated and contributing to the demise of America's forestlands. With a clear, contemporary vision that will address the management, protection and wise use of America's natural resources, we envision a very different narrative for effective land stewardship in order to help meet the natural resources conservation demands, now and ahead. Specifically, we envision:

- a) **Forest Resources.** Forest resources that are utilized at a sustainable level to enable economic prosperity. This level of management is well within the growth potential of the land while accommodating historic levels of "natural disturbance" that once drove effective rejuvenation processes. The well-intended policies found in the Endangered Species Act (ESA) habitat retention, minor sediment disturbance requirements of the Clean Water Act, and prescribed fire smoke restrictions, as examples, are not respectful of the dynamic forested ecosystem; they temporarily attempt to hold nature static in time. This method of management may meet the current policies and laws, but when nature exerts an overwhelming need to rebalance the system, the results of wide spread disease and catastrophic fire effects are uncharacteristically outside the normal range of ecosystem function due to man's short-term intervention. The harvesting of trees for wood products coupled with fuel reduction for prescribed fire on both public and private lands must become much closer to mimicking the natural processes to ensure forested ecosystems are healthy, sustainable and more resilient to disturbances. A broad range of forest stand ages, ecologically known as "seral stages", must be maintained across landscapes to enhance biodiversity, increase multiple uses and their benefits -- while strengthening of rural economies. Aggressive forest management, including the targeted removal of hazardous fuels, is the most effective way to modify large fire behavior and return fire to its natural role on the land. The desired future condition is met by reducing the number, duration and size of catastrophic fires, and burned forests are returned to productivity by quickly salvaging usable wood products, closely followed by reforestation. Proactive forest management using this technique produces sustainable products and enable innovative, cost-effective market-based

solutions from these well-managed forests.

- b) **Partnerships.** Local governments, public agencies and private natural resource management organizations alongside proactive conservation groups, are the basis of a strong coalition for contemporary land stewardship. This partnership is included in all local land management planning efforts, leading to increased resource utilization by, avoiding duplication and achieving greater efficiency. Communities have a stronger involvement in natural resources management efforts and are committed to success.
- c) **Recreation.** Recreation on forestlands is a key to helping improve people's lives and their communities. People view our forests as a place to enjoy and recoup. The quality of trails, lakes and complete landscapes are a basis of national pride. Others closely observe the quality of conservation that is given to the lands and are guided by America's level of excellence and public acceptance. Funding from all sources is increased due to the support and enhanced value of recreation areas. Reducing the loss of forested cover from disturbances like high intensity fires and insect and diseases through well-planned forest management actions will enhance recreation values.
- d) **Research and Technology Development.** Research, and the sharing of leading-edge technologies, increases the value and profitability of both public and private lands. Readily used applications are developed in partnership with a wide-range of users and science-based organizations. Priority discovery is given to actions that will directly benefit the environment, multiple use conservation and the profitability of the end users and all science is in concert with the agency missions. New innovations in biomass uses, such as the expanded use of cellulose nanomaterials and advanced wood-composites for construction materials help achieve full biomass utilization and accelerated economic expansion in a wide-range of products and services throughout the country.
- e) **Water.** Clean water and adequate supply are once again available to all users due to excellent and aggressive stewardship of our Nation's lands. Managing our landscapes for increased snow retention and groundwater recharge is critical to provide the necessary water for our growing populations and fisheries, especially in the west. Water-based recreation is both profitable to land managers and is used at a level never before attained. The innovative management of our forests allows for clean water that is available to meet the priority demands for a growing America.

- f) **Wildlife.** Our Nation's forests and grasslands are healthy, sustainable and provide abundant, high quality habitat for wildlife. Wildlife diversity is expanded and sustained. Through the use of modern mapping tools, these dynamic ecosystems can be managed for all habitats in sufficient quantities and quality to protect and enhance all species, including those listed under the ESA. Due to sound planning and a high-level of local involvement, a consensus is achieved in determining the balance of services provided by the lands across all ownerships.

- g) **Rural Communities.** Increased employment in rural areas is significantly improved due to better resource management. Twenty-five percent tax receipts, now at record low levels, are increased so local jurisdictions are better able to provide basic services for their citizens and our children. These include safe roads and schools as two primary immediate recipients. Personal income is up and stagnated economies dependent on government subsidies finally begin to recover. Advice and leadership from a wide-range of state and local partners is valued and sought. Local resource users positively comment on the high quality of services provided by government entities, pointing to a wide-range of land condition enhancements. Funding is effectively used to maximize the outputs of planned forest management projects.

- h) **Fire.** Aggressive forest management becomes the critical link to effective fire management. Increased timber harvesting, including increased removals of hazardous fuel, along with new innovations in biomass uses and fire control technology will enable wildland fire to become an effective land restoration tool. Well-planned prescribed fires are conducted by skilled fire managers and the cooperation and coordination between all federal, state, local personnel involved is always cohesive and the basis of success.

Sec. 4. Definition (s). (a) "Stewardship" is the management, protection and wise use of natural resources, including all forestlands along a complex rural to urban land gradient. (b) "Biomass Uses" from hazardous fuels – for example, wood-based nanotechnology; Green Building Construction, including advanced composites; and, wood for energy -- offer pragmatic market-based solutions to help our forests become more resilient. It is estimated that a strong, well-established program in cost-effective biomass uses will create high-value markets from low-value wood (i.e., hazardous fuels) to reasonably help restore up to 19 million forested-acres annually (7-8 million acres annually on the National Forests) and

reduce future fire suppression costs in the range of 12-15 percent (some suggest as high as 23 percent). Expanded “biomass uses” shall be part of the forest management strategy. (c) “Decades-long aggressive fire suppression” is a way of dealing with an overwhelming force of nature, like wildfire, and constitutes the use of all possible assets (i.e., firefighters, aircraft, ground equipment) to deal with the fire. Experience shows, however, that escalating short-term operational opposition to wildfires which endanger societal values has contributed to wildfire becoming more damaging to societal values (i.e., the “wildfire paradox”).

Sec. 5. Policy. It shall be the policy of the Federal Government to improve the management of America’s forest through its direct role on public lands as well as its indirect role in providing technical assistance on non-federal lands. The United States will further this policy for the benefit of the American people and in a safe and environmentally responsible manner, by:

- (a) **Convening a “Commission on the Stewardship of America’s Forests.”** This Commission will be co-led by the Secretaries of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Department of Interior (DOI). The makeup of the Commission will be at the discretion of both Secretaries, but shall include at least the Chief, USDA Forest Service; Director, Bureau of Land Management; Director, National Park Service; and, President, National Association of State Foresters. The Commission will fully utilize the collective insight and innovation of a wide range of partners so trees, forests and forest ecosystems across all landscapes can become healthy, sustainable and more resilient to disturbances such as insects and diseases and wildfire.

- (b) **Statement of Intent.** Institute a Long-Term Campaign of “Aggressive Forest Management Improves Fire Management.” Immediately direct the establishment of a USDA-DOI led campaign that acknowledges that aggressive forest management improves fire management and reduces high intensity, catastrophic wildfire. This will include implementing an aggressive fire management program that allows more of the right kind of fire at the right time at the right place, using both prescribed and wildfire. United States taxpayers are losing \$20 to \$100 billion (or more) a year in wildfire related damages to infrastructure, public health and natural resources. Wildfires are a major cause of losses to the forest products industry. Cost-effective fire management can only be accomplished with a concurrent and equally aggressive forest

management strategy that includes well-planned vegetation removals, including at least the doubling of the current timber harvest program on public lands.

i. **Corporate Deployment of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire**

Management Strategy. Effective fire management also includes a much more corporate deployment of the existing National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy (NCWFMS), an effective program direction that includes “restoring and maintaining resilient landscapes” as a core principle. However, the NCWFMS is not yet mainstream or consistently deployed. It shall become so, as directed by this Executive Order.

- (c) **Hazardous Fuels Reduction.** In the late 1990’s, the General Accounting Office (GAO) concluded that “the most extensive and serious problem related to the health of forests in the interior West is the over-accumulation of vegetation, which has caused an increasing number of large, intense, uncontrollable, and catastrophically destructive wildfires.” In developing the “Managing the Impacts of Wildfires on Communities and the Environment” -- the *National Fire Plan* -- in 2001, about \$850 million annually was thought to be required to more effectively address the issue of hazardous fuels removal. More recently in 2013, the GAO concluded it would take about \$69 billion over a 16-year period -- \$4.3 billion each year. Relying on taxpayer dollars, the Forest Service, for example, has managed an average of about \$300 million annually for hazardous fuels treatment. Thus, with only a fraction of required funds available, focusing work on the highest priority areas is fundamental to success. Accordingly, we must implement a much more targeted approach to hazardous fuels reduction program on the highest priority areas. This must include the expanded use of innovative biomass uses such as cellulose nanomaterials and advanced wood-composites for construction materials by creating high-value markets from lower-value wood. Expanded biomass uses will create cost-effective ways to enable enough hazardous fuels to be removed from America’s forests so wildfires remain smaller and begin again to be a tool for improved forest health as opposed to destructive behemoths that destroy lives, communities and landscapes.

Sec. 6. Implementation.

- a) **Statement of Intent.** Within 5 days after this Executive Order (EO) is signed, the

Secretaries will direct the establishment of a USDA-DOI led campaign that acknowledges that “Aggressive Forest Management Improves Fire Management.” This will be a clear Statement of Intent (SOI) to all employees in both Departments, and the publics they serve, that forest management will become a foundational element of effective fire management. All regulatory agencies within the federal government that participate in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes, will aid in the resilience of our Nation’s forests through implementation of consultation policies that mandate the “no action” alternative be fully weighed for each NEPA decision with regard to the overwhelming likelihood of continued loss of forested cover. It will be acknowledged that current “static-point in time” analysis policies, driven by short-term effects determination statements, can paradoxically place our Nation’s forests and associated wildlife and fish habitats at great risk. The campaign associated with this SOI will include specific provisions for a new, expanded program direction enabling adequate protection of lives and property from wildfire and the creation of healthy, sustainable forests that will become more resilient to disturbances.

i. **Corporate Deployment of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire**

Management Strategy. Within 10 days after this EO is signed, the Secretaries of the USDA and DOI will publish a plan that enables a more corporate, consistent deployment of this national strategy.

b) **Timber Harvest Levels and Hazardous Fuel Removals.** Within 25 days from the date that this EO is signed, the Secretaries of the USDA and DOI will develop two documents:

i. **Timber Harvest Levels.** This document will include an estimate of the timber harvest levels that can be sustainably harvested from public lands from 2018-2025. The estimates, in billion board feet, will be broken down by DOI (BLM) and USDA (National Forests) administered lands. The document will include estimated costs to produce the new timber harvest levels (as compared to the current levels).

ii. **Hazardous Fuel Reduction.** This document will include an estimate of the hazardous fuels reduction levels that can be removed, assuming adequate markets and innovations (i.e., wood-based nanotechnology) are in place. The document will include high, medium and low priority removal areas and their associated costs. Costs associated with expanded markets and new innovations shall also be included. Information will be illustrated as in item i, above, by

both USDA and DOI administered lands.

- c) **Convene a Commission.** Within 30 days from the date that this Executive Order (EO) is signed, the Secretaries of the USDA and DOI will convene a “Commission on the Stewardship of America’s Forests.” The final report will be provided to the President within 120 days after this EO is signed. The specific outline of the report will be determined by the Commission, under the overall leadership of the USDA and DOI Secretaries.

Sec. 7. General Provisions. (a) Nothing in this order shall be construed to impair or otherwise affect:

- (i) the authority granted by law to an executive department or agency, or the head thereof;
 - (ii) the functions of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget relating to budgetary, administrative, or legislative proposals; or
 - (iii) existing treaties or international agreements relating to mineral production, imports, or exports.
- (b) This order shall be implemented consistent with applicable law and subject to the availability of appropriations.
- (c) This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.