

# LAND OWNERS

## LEGISLATIVE • ALERT

By **JAY JENSEN**, Washington Office, National Association of State Foresters

**O**n October 11, President Clinton signed the Interior appropriations bill into law finalizing State & Private Forestry program funding for fiscal year 2001. The \$18.8 billion measure includes over \$368 million for S&PF, the highest level of spending in the last five years for the federal programs the state foresters implement. This large increase is thanks in large part to lawmakers' response to this season's wildfires and desire to pass a conservation package similar to the Conservation and Reinvestment Act and the Administration's Lands Legacy Initiative.

Although \$118 million of this S&PF increase is considered emergency spending, or one-time spending, the overall increases begin to reflect the investment needed to properly represent the public's interest in nonfederal forestlands. These emergency monies are intended to help states respond and prepare for future wildland fire situations.

### Forest Health

The Forest Health line items (federal and cooperative lands forest health management) jumped nearly \$16 million bringing funding totals to \$76.444 million. An extra \$12 million was added through one-time emergency funding to help address forest health threats stemming from the western fires.

### Cooperative Fire

The cooperative fire line items (state and volunteer fire assistance) received the largest increase thanks to the emergency money booster. The normal appropriations resulted in a modest \$2 million increase for the two programs with the

volunteer fire assistance program serving as the primary beneficiary as lawmakers begin to take note of the contributions volunteer firefighters make to initial suppression of wildland fires. However, emergency monies totaled \$58.774 million, meaning that state forestry agencies will be better able to clean up and respond to wildland fire threats. Overall, cooperative fire programs will see at least \$88 million coming their way.

### Cooperative Forestry

Cooperative forestry programs all fared well with the Forest Legacy program distancing itself from the pack with an increase of \$35 million over last year thanks to the Conservation and Reinvestment Act and the Lands Legacy Initiative. Although the Stewardship Incentives Program was again zeroed out, failing to capture any Congressional support, the Forest Stewardship and Urban & Community Forestry programs received decent increases for their work in the rural and urban forest landscape. Although the Economic Action Programs were again heavily earmarked this year, an extra \$12.5 million in emergency money is slotted to help local communities impacted by the wildfires recover faster. Although the NASF water quality line item, better known as the Watershed Forestry Initiative, did not receive funding, state foresters are actively working and making progress to get this included in future years.

One of the more interesting inclusions in this year's spending bill is the \$35 million provided for "Community and Private Land Fire Assistance." These are new funds, directed to be allocated through the S&PF account, for recovery

activities on private lands affected by this year's western wildfires. Conference language directs this money "primarily" to the west. The state foresters are working closely with the USDA Forest Service to help direct the expenditure of these flexible funds to ensure their most efficient and appropriate application.

### Forest Inventory and Analysis

If there is a downside to this year's funding levels, it is that adequate funding for the Forest Inventory and Analysis program was unable to be obtained. However, Congress did provide \$5 million to assist state forestry agencies in the implementation of annualized inventory, but that will still leave the overall program behind schedule. An appropriation increase of \$8 million annually for the next three years will keep the program on track according to the FIA business plan.

### Forestry Incentives Program

Congress also completed action on the Agriculture Appropriations bill in mid-October. The agriculture spending bill contains a number of forest landowner assistance/outreach programs and forestry research programs. Primary on that list is the Forestry Incentives Program, which continues to limp along at a continuing \$6.325 million for FY 2001. Along with the Stewardship Incentives Program, the state foresters hope to craft a new forest landowner cost-share assistance program out of FIP that will capture the components of both programs in the 2002 Farm Bill. 🏠

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