

# National Policy Update for ACT Members

November 13, 2007

## Forest Service Update

### **FY 2008 Budget and Advocacy Accomplishments**

In late June, the House of Representatives passed Interior and Environment Appropriations for FY 2008 to restore funding to a wide array of conservation and environmental protection programs. The House provided \$355 million above the President's budget request to the U.S. Forest Service, including a small increase for the Urban and Community Forestry Program, resulting in a \$31,130,000 budget for U&CF. The Senate Appropriations Committee has approved a similar figure - \$30,846,000 - for U&CF, though the full Senate has not yet voted.

U&CF advocates nationwide made their voices heard this past spring and summer, and ACT encourages advocates to communicate the value of urban forestry to their elected officials on an ongoing basis. Through grassroots outreach organized by ACT, over 170 state and local organizations signed on to the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition request supported by Alliance for Community Trees along with ISA, APWA, NADF, American Forests, and other national organizations. We heard positive confirmation from Hill staff that the message reached its target. See the full FY 2008 coalition statement located at: [http://actrees.org/files/Policy\\_Alerts/2008\\_SUFC\\_RECS.pdf](http://actrees.org/files/Policy_Alerts/2008_SUFC_RECS.pdf)

President Bush threatened to veto the 2008 appropriations for Interior, Environment and the U.S. Forest Service because the bill came in \$2 billion over the President's request. Agencies will operate under a continuing resolution for the foreseeable future, which means flat budgets similar to FY 06 and FY 07.

While appropriations are level, it appears that within some research units, urban forest research is receiving increasing priority, particularly within the Northeastern Area. Urban forest research is not a separate line item in the budget but is part of the overall R&D Budget for the USFS. Some units, such as CUFR in Davis, Ca., have not grown - advocates who value the work coming out of a specific research unit may want to educate lawmakers and the Forest Service about the value of the unit's research.

### **FY 2009 Outlook**

The outlook for the President's FY 2009 budget for the Forest Service is especially grim. It is expected that sharp cuts to State and Private Forestry Programs, including U&CF, will be issued across the board next February in the Administration's budget. Research is not expected to receive such cuts. ACT staff met with Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment Melissa Simpson in the spring and with USFS Chief Gail Kimball over the summer to express our support for U&CF and concern about the FY 09 budget. Urban forestry advocates should prepare for a robust push in Congress next year to restore funding for FY 09, as was required for FY 08.

### **Working Against a Budget Trend**

The Forest Service now devotes more than 45 percent of its budget to fire suppression and preparedness, compared to 13 percent in 1991 and 25 percent in 2000. Meanwhile, USFS is facing a \$300 million increase in planned fire suppression costs for fiscal 2009, leading the agency to plan for cuts in other programs. The agency is leading a "Transformation" process to reduce staffing by 25% in DC and regional offices.

### **America's Climate Security Act**

Legislation now in the Senate would use funds generated by a cap and trade system to help fund fire suppression costs. As a result of markup on November 1, America's Climate Security Act includes provisions to provide an additional \$800 million to the Forest Service and \$300 million to the Department of the Interior annually for firefighting costs.

The full Environment and Public Works (EPW) Committee has scheduled two hearings on "America's Climate Security Act of 2007" for November 8th and November 13th. Barbara Boxer (D-California) is chairwoman of the EPW Committee. It would be appropriate to write to members of the EPW Committee

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stating your support for the fire suppression provision of the Climate Security Act. There are several versions of climate legislation at play; it would be good for any legislation that emerges to include this provision.

### USFS State and Private Redesign

The Forest Service continues to work with NASF and its Redesign Committee to enact significant changes in how the Forest Service delivers its full suite of cooperative State and Private programs. U&CF is one of several programs in this section of the agency. The Redesign aims to shift programs from a landowner assistance model to addressing critical issues at a landscape level. This will generally mean greater integration of programs, fewer program “silos”, and a focus on top line issues. The three key issues that S&PF will address are 1) Conserving Working Forest Landscapes, 2) Protecting Forests from Harm, and 3) Enhancing the benefits received from trees and forests.

It is not yet clear how the Redesign will change U&CF programs at the local level, but there will be a change in how state agencies interact with the Forest Service. State agencies will be challenged to compete for S&PF funding and up to 65% of the federal funding will be for competitive regional scale projects. In the past, federal funds were allocated to different program buckets (U&CF, Forest Stewardship, Forest Legacy etc.). In the future, funds will be tied to outcomes on the landscape; funds will be integrated and programs will be integrated.

To the degree that State agencies are dependent on USFS funding, you may see significant changes to local assistance programs delivered by the states. If you want to preserve good programs that no longer fit the USFS priorities, it would be wise to seek state sources of revenue. State advocacy has been active in CA, MN, and MA. Many states will retool existing programs to remain eligible for federal assistance.

In addition, it is important to remember that the USFS is undertaking a 25% “Transformation” process to reduce staffing. S&PF may bear a greater share of staff reductions than some other parts of the agency.

### Energy Efficiency Through Trees Draft Legislation

This summer and fall, with support from Sacramento Tree Foundation, Sacramento Municipal Utility District, and Alliance for Community Trees, freshman Congresswoman Doris Matsui drafted legislation that would encourage utility companies to partner with community nonprofits to plant trees for energy conservation. The legislation would incentivize an approach similar to the *Sacramento Shade* program. This fall, ACT coordinated a review with members of the SUFC to provide feedback on the draft legislation. ACT is continuing to work with Congresswoman Matsui’s staff in Washington to provide support and we hope it will be introduced soon. Alliance for Community Trees is asking all of its members to support the Energy Efficiency Through Trees act. The act is not yet introduced; keep your eye out for E-mails from ACT with instructions for when and how to take action.

### Emerald Ash Borer Municipality Assistance Act of 2007

Senator Durbin introduced legislation to provide low cost loan assistance to localities to combat infestation from Emerald Ash Borer and other invasive pests. S.1717 would finance contracts and purchases of authorized equipment to monitor, remove, dispose of, and replace infested trees.

### We Need YOU to Advocate for Trees

The Alliance for Community Trees is optimistic that working together, urban and community forestry proponents can restore funding for existing programs, and seek out new opportunities presented by the nation’s renewed interest in climate change, energy conservation, and urban revitalization.

Please visit with the local district office of your Representative and Senators. Brief them now about the value of urban forests so that when you come back during budget season, or when you have a specific bill to support, they will know who you are and be more inclined to give the matter consideration. You are the issue expert and they want to talk to you. Build a relationship, be informative, make a clear request for action, and offer yourself as a resource. Sign up for ACT E-mail alerts to keep informed.