



# **National Association of Conservation Districts**

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**Testimony of the National Association of Conservation Districts  
Submitted to the  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
U.S. House of Representatives  
March 26, 2009**

On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is pleased to provide comments to the Subcommittee regarding fiscal year 2010 appropriations. Established under state law, conservation districts are local units of government charged with carrying out programs for the protection and management of natural resources at the local level. Conservation districts help state and federal partners work with landowners on a variety of conservation programs, and respectfully support funding of \$300.582 million for the State and Private Forestry programs under the USDA Forest Service (FS), and \$218.957 million for the 319 Nonpoint Source Grants Program authorized under the Clean Water Act and administered by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The State and Private Forestry branch works with a broad range of programs that address the protection, wise use and management of forested lands, normally in partnership with the state forestry organizations and other partners. It provides technical and financial assistance to both rural and urban landowners and resource managers to help sustain the nation's private and municipal forests and their many benefits including water quality, air quality, and energy conservation while protecting against forest pests, invasive species, and wildland fires. While 73 percent of the nation's timberland is privately owned, annual funding for the FS State and Private Forestry programs has been declining for the last several years.

Throughout the country, the demands on our forest lands continue to increase. Multiple use management of our renewable forest resources continues to ensure a wide range of ecosystem services are provided to the general public while maintaining the productivity of the land and protecting the quality of the environment. These benefits are achieved by employing proper resource management that provides the best combination of uses. Because of changes in land ownership, land use, and other growing natural resource concerns, funding remains the critical component to ensure these benefits continue. The FS State and Private Forestry programs help provide the necessary technical and financial assistance to landowners and land managers for the continued maintenance of healthy, productive forested lands.

To ensure this assistance continues to be available, NACD respectfully supports \$300.582 million in funding for State and Private Forestry programs in the Fiscal Year

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2010 Interior Appropriations Bill. The State and Private Forestry Redesign and its competitive resource allocation process address these national themes: conserve working forest landscapes, protect forests from harm and enhance public benefits from trees and forests. However, these goals will be impossible if the current means used to fund wildfire suppression is not changed. Wildfire suppression must be funded in a manner that does not impact all other FS programs and puts an end to “fire borrowing”. This adjustment to current procedures will ensure that the appropriations we are requesting are sufficient to the critical tasks we have mentioned above.

NACD has recently signed an MOU committing ourselves and the FS to working with the National Association of State Foresters and the Natural Resources Conservation Service to significantly improve collaboration among the parties and an improved and integrated delivery of financial and technical services to the country’s private non-industrial forestland owners and managers. The potential for cooperative management of this critical resource base and the provision of timely and effective assistance for this component of the landscape is vital to all areas of natural resources development and protection. State and Private Forestry programs will be at the heart of this effort, and full support is crucial to the success of this broad and inclusive effort.

The 319 Nonpoint Source Program addresses water pollution from diffuse sources that affect water quality and can include nutrient and sediment runoff from agriculture, faulty septic systems from residential properties, or storm water runoff such as oil, toxic chemicals, and sediment. Under this program, EPA awards funding to states that are then used by state and local units of government to implement locally-led nonpoint source pollution projects. The 319 program is critically important to conservation districts in addressing water quality at the local level through a variety of projects including utilization of agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as buffer strips, conservation tillage, and nutrient management; stream bank stabilization, temperature and turbidity reduction, storm water management, and low-impact development. The program also provides flexibility to address resources concerns that are outside the scope of many traditional United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) conservation programs.

NACD respectfully supports a funding level of \$218.957 million for 319 Nonpoint Source Grants in the FY 2010 Interior Appropriations Bill. This increase in funding will provide continuing support in addressing nonpoint source pollution, ensuring that local communities will continue to realize the benefits of clean water. The increase in funding will also help leverage cost-share funding at the state and local level, providing added benefit for the federal dollars spent.

The nation’s conservation districts look forward to future opportunities to work with state and federal partners to continue to provide the benefits of natural resource conservation across the country. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee as priorities are developed for FY 2010 Interior appropriations.