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March 14, 2006

The Honorable Greg Walden
1210 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-3702
capitol fax: (202) 225-5774

Dear Chairman Walden:

Hurricanes, windstorms, ice storms, wildfires, insect and disease outbreaks, and many other catastrophes can cause immense damage to forests and the associated water, wildlife, recreation, timber, and scenic values. **The Society of American Foresters (SAF) representing more than 15,000 professional forest managers, researchers, and consultants across the country supports the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act (FERRA) (HR 4200) which will give federal forest managers the tools to promptly assess damage after these events and recover and reforest damaged areas where necessary.**

Annually, an average of more than five million acres of forests burn in wildfires. In 2003, insects or disease severely impacted 12 million acres of forests, up from more than 6 million in 2002. Hurricanes have left a major footprint on forests in Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Texas, and Florida in the past year, damaging more than 5 million acres. Ice storms and windstorms affect forests across the nation on a yearly basis. Catastrophic events will forever alter our forests, but we can bring them back quickly with timely and thoughtful science and experience-informed management.

If action is necessary, timeliness is critical in the aftermath of forest catastrophes. Federal forest managers need processes that allow them to take quick action to recover and restore forests and the associated values. Currently, it can take up to two years to complete assessments following these events. FERRA would improve response times.

FERRA would also provide for additional research to help improve actions forest managers take in responding to catastrophes. This is critical as forests and their management needs continue to change. Forest managers need the latest scientific information to do their job more effectively.

We urge you to support the Forest Emergency Recovery and Research Act and oppose any amendments that would undermine the provisions in the bill that enable prompt action.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael T. Goergen, Jr.
Executive Vice President, CEO