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California's Forests At Top of Policy Agenda

Educational Program Illustrates How Managing Forests Could Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions from Wildfires by 50% and Help California Meet 30% of its GHG Reduction Target

Sacramento — Coinciding with a series of wildfire-related forums in California, forest managers and owners today launched an education program to illustrate the need and opportunity for science-based approaches to managing the state's public and private forests.

Called Forests for the Next Century, the educational program uses third-party scientific analysis to illustrate how current forest management policies on public lands are threatening the health of forests in California and jeopardizing the opportunity for the forests to be a significant ally in the fight to reduce the state's greenhouse gas emissions.

"The single largest source of greenhouse gases today is from carbon dioxide (CO₂) released into the atmosphere from wildfires and insect infestation," said Dr. Tom Bonnicksen, Professor Emeritus, Forest Science, Texas A&M University. "Decades of inaction and inattention have put our dense, unhealthy federal forests in danger from modern catastrophic fires," emphasized Bonnicksen.

In numerous studies, forestry scientists conclude that there is an opportunity to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions by managing our forests to keep them healthy and resistant to disease, wildfire and decay.

According to the Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions, by applying intelligent management principles and practices, forests in North America could offset 1.6 billion tons of CO₂ per year by 2025. This is equal to nearly 85% of CO₂ emitted by all vehicles in the U.S. according to the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

In another report by the American Forest Resource Council, thinning and removing underbrush in public forests could reduce wildfire acreage by 50-60%, resulting in over a million fewer tons of greenhouse gas emissions—equivalent to taking about 160,000 cars off our roads every year.

"Unfortunately, well-meaning but misguided federal policies have dominated forest management in the U.S., turning federal forests into a significant global warming contributor," said Dave Bischel, registered professional forester, president of the California Forestry Association and member of the Forests for the Next Century project. "In California, actively managing our public forests as we do our private forests could meet 30% of the state's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions."

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Wildfire costs are also busting the U.S. Forest Service budget. According to a recent *Los Angeles Times* report (7/27/08), “a decade ago, the Forest Service agency spent \$307 million on fire suppression. Last year, it spent \$1.37 billion. Fire is chewing through so much Forest Service money that Congress is considering a separate federal account to cover the cost of catastrophic blazes.” The *LA Times* report also noted that in California, state wildfire spending has shot up 150 percent in the last decade, to more than \$1 billion a year.

“Since 2007, damage from several years of catastrophic wildfires have devastated more than nine million acres nationally and cost federal agencies and taxpayers nearly \$1.8 billion,” said Bischel. “Another 2,000-plus fires have burned nearly 1.2 million acres of California’s forests already this year. California’s professional foresters know how to manage forests better. Foresters are proving on private land what needs to be done in public forests to keep them healthy and thriving, so that they can be one of our greatest allies in the fight against global warming,” Bischel continued.

The Forests for the Next Century education effort includes TV ads in California and Nevada, an informational video of experts and a Web site: www.rethinkforests.com. The program comes in the wake of thousands of wildfires that have burned throughout California this fire season alone, and during a week of forums scheduled this week that bring together policy-makers and other stakeholders to address forest health and climate change:

Wednesday, August 13 — Forestry experts, policy and community leaders will participate in a forum sponsored by the State Rural Legislative Caucus to explore ways to protect lives, communities and forests from catastrophic wildfires.

Time/Location: 10 a.m. at the Capitol Building in Sacramento, Room 4203

Wednesday, August 13 — Climate Initiative Dialogue Group conference call, presentation on the activities of the Western Climate Initiative.

**Time/Location: 1:30 to 3 p.m. (PDT) Domestic Calls: 1-888-566-0007
Participant Pass Code: 8750371**

Friday, August 15 — Scoping Plan Workshop hosted by the California Air Resources Board — seeks public input on proposed scoping document for how California will achieve target reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020.

Time/Location: 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, 1600 Pacific Highway, Room 310

Saturday, August 16 — Senator Dianne Feinstein and representatives from the U.S. Forest Service and California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection at the 12th Annual Lake Tahoe Summit in South Lake Tahoe—the site of the devastating Angora fire last year.

**Time/Location: 9 a.m. at the Valhalla Estate at the Tallac Historic Site on Highway 89, just north of Camp Richardson Resort in South Lake Tahoe.
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