



National Association of Conservation Districts

**House Committee on Natural Resources
Hearing on Funding Wildland Fire Suppression
Comments submitted by the National Association of Conservation Districts
April 10, 2008**

On behalf of the nation's 3,000 conservation districts, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) is pleased to provide comments to the Committee regarding how emergency wildland fire suppression is funded. 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.

In carrying out their mission, districts work closely with the USDA's Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service and the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management to provide the technical assistance and other help private landowners need to plan and apply complex conservation treatments on forest, range and other working lands.

NACD encourages support for policies and programs that prevent the buildup of hazardous fuels and rehabilitate those lands damaged by wildfire. Such efforts should be coordinated with biomass utilization projects and include criteria for enhancing watershed health. However, this will be impossible if the current means used to fund wildfire suppression is not changed. Currently, when the costs of wildfire suppression exceed the allocation, unobligated funds from other accounts are transferred to pay the costs of suppression. Wildfire suppression must be funded in a manner that does not impact all other federal agency programs and puts an end to "fire borrowing".

Conservation districts applaud the actions by the Natural Resources Committee and the Agriculture Committee for their legislation, HR 5541, Federal Land Assistance, Management and Enhancement Act, and HR5648, Emergency Wildland Fire Response Act of 2008. Both of the bills provide an emergency funding mechanism for suppression of catastrophic wildland fires that should end the disruption of activities caused by "fire borrowing". Stakeholders remain ready and willing to assist in addressing not only the funding issue but also other aspects of wildland fire like the reduction of risk, rehabilitation of burned over areas and improvement of watersheds and wildlife habitat.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Committee on these issues and working at the state and local level to explore opportunities to partner with federal, state and local emergency response agencies to address natural resources recovery.