

NAFSR WHITE PAPER  
RETHINKING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES  
October 2020

The NAFSR Board has indicated it continues to believe that we have a solid “Program of Work” for CY 2020-2021. We also have our well researched 2016 recommendations for the new administration at that time which remains largely relevant. But despite that it may be time to ask ourselves if we are missing important issues or gotten off track in some way. Therefore, Chairman Caswell requested a subset of the Board to take a look at that question. A group consisting of Jack Troyer, Jim Golden, Steve Eubanks, Jane Kollmeyer, Greg Griffith, Rich Stem, and Tom Thompson did so. Their thoughts follow and will hopefully be useful for Chairman Caswell to use in leading a future Board discussion on strategic priorities.

As a reminder, the current Program of Work has two parts. Part I is normal operations. Part 2 is Strategic priorities A-F and is summarized as follows:

- A. Keeping Public Lands Public
- B. Refocus efforts to outreach NAFSR change platform to a broader audience. They consist of Forestry Policy/Process (EADM), Project Capacity, and Active management EO/2021 budget initiative.
- C. CEQ NEPA (proposed rule comments)
- D. Reforestation/Forest Climate Working Group, “The Silent Crisis”
- E. Emerging issues
- F. Infrastructure

This effort in a sense reflects an attempt to strategically think about Section E. Some background thoughts from the team are useful here. To think about possible new focus items, it was useful to take a step back and look at what the Forest Service should be focusing on because the core of our NAFSR mission is Sustaining the Forest Service mission. It may not be stated in so many words but in reality, a large part is ensuring the long-term existence of the National Forests and Grasslands. There are many facets to that, but they all depend on having national forests and grasslands.

So if the Forest Service’s main focus should be ensuring the existence of the national forests and grasslands what threatens that? There are certainly the physical threats to the forests and grasslands themselves. But is it always useful to ask if the existence of the Forest Service itself as a federal agency is in jeopardy? There are factions that are and have been trying to undermine its existence but how credible is that threat. If the Forest Service ceased to exist, the forests and grasslands would be in further jeopardy than they are now.

With those different but related thoughts in mind the main challenge at this moment in time is the wildfire/ forest management/restoration situation in the West. There are, of course, many others. If the Forest Service is not able to turn around the current trend of wildfires the pressure from privatization and state takeover advocates might again find more receptive ears

in the public and especially in more rural areas. It is rural areas where people have seen both the visibility and effectiveness of the agency decline and businesses relying on forest outputs reduced or eliminated. With those thoughts in mind future strategic issues and recommendations follow.

#### Issue 1: Forest Service budget and capacity.

Discussion: This is not a new issue and is part of our program of work but is so important it must be re-emphasized. Progress on this issue may well be the basis of succeeding or not for the future Forest Service. It must re-evaluate what has happened in the last 15 years and what can be done about it. Part of this effort must continue to focus on the administrative burden crisis and its effect on field productivity. Rethinking our approach and focusing on the Deputy Chief level of leadership should be considered. The NFS Deputy Chief must be vitally interested and involved in helping solve the administrative burden crisis. If the main resource issue is the wildfire crisis what is needed plain and simple is more funding and capacity. The funding and capacity issue, of course, is also at the root of the decline in recreation capacity and maintenance of infrastructure, roads, trails, water systems, and many other programs. It is also important to acknowledge that the current reality is a field work force forced to work remotely right now which is causing discomfort and additional complexities in getting the job done.

The amount of additional funding needed is substantial and building support for the level of increase is a daunting task. For example, in California, Region Five and the State have signed a Memorandum of Understanding in which each endorse completion of 500,000 acres of forest management per year. Even 500,000 acres per year on California's National Forests may not be enough-that amount is necessary just in the northern forests-but that amount alone would likely require over a billion dollars per year for several years. Additional funding to cover the cost of restoring internal agency infrastructure to prepare the projects and external infrastructure to carry them out would also be necessary. And this is just for Region Five.

Recommendations: 1. Continued follow through on the capacity budget issue using our workforce capacity report. 2. Increase efforts to work with our partners to in turn work with Congress to make the case for increased funding. Reach out in a more organized way with county commissioners and the role they are now playing or not playing.

#### Issue 2: Reforestation and Climate change.

Discussion: These are not new issues but what is new is the magnitude of the recent ecological, human, and community disaster that unfolded in California, Oregon, and Washington. Reforestation and climate change are very important individual issues, but right now leveraging opportunities through the climate change issue seems particularly fruitful to help our chances of influencing the reforestation problem. As we advocate for increased and vitally needed reforestation funding we must be careful to put it into the bigger context of active forest management which includes reforestation.

Recommendation: Look for opportunities led by our Reforestation/climate change working group to influence legislation and funding in every possible way. Create a list of measurable actions as we have done with other issues and make assignments to raise the issue and then influence it as part of a strong action plan.

### Issue 3: Sustainable Recreation

Discussion: Growth in all forms of outdoor recreation has far outpaced the ability of the agency to accommodate it. As a result, undesirable impacts to the land are surfacing. While the recent legislation will help with the deferred maintenance backlog it is operations and the need for new facilities that need attention. There are many parts to the problem one of which is a public that in general has never acquired the necessary outdoor skills. Another problem is how to better involve the booming outdoor recreation and tourism industries to become a larger part of the solution.

Recommendation: Consider sustainable recreation as a future emphasis issue and consider it a lynchpin in long term efforts to “Keeping Public Lands Public.”

### OTHER IDEAS FOR CONSIDERATION IN LIGHT OF LIMITED NAFSR CAPACITY

1. Invest time to understand the new budget process and how we can influence how it is executed.
2. Never lose sight of the need to expand wider membership and the need for effective communications with it.
3. Discuss, evaluate, and formulate a NAFSR position on “managed wildfire”. This is becoming an increasingly major topic for some retirees, and other segments of the public. We need to be as clear as possible on our position. In doing so, it will be important for NAFSR to learn more of the recent and yet to be published science of this year’s mega fires.
4. Revise or clarify our approach with the Department in light of the coming transition of administrations regardless of whether or not it is a second Trump administration or a Biden administration.
5. Follow and influence execution and to the extent possible the regulations (both CEQ and FS) we have worked hard to participate in.
6. Consider asking the Forest Service if it would be interested in NAFSR forming teams of retirees willing to mentor or facilitate meeting with new Forest Service line and staff officers. Evaluate whether or not we have the desire and capability to do so.

### CLOSING THOUGHTS

Our agenda and strategy generally fall into two categories. The first category is our core agenda items which should stand the test of time and stay pretty much the same regardless of the

national political situation. Supporting active management and keeping public lands public are good examples. Most of our work, initiatives, and priorities fall into this category and seem to be pretty much on target but will always need monitoring and refinement. The second category is our ability to size up the political situation and take advantage of opportunities to advance the mission, strength, and performance of the Forest Service. When we see what administration we will soon be dealing with it will be important to formulate a new transition strategy. Hopefully, this discussion paper will be useful in that regard.