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PUBLIC LANDS STEERING COMMITTEE**ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, AND LAND USE STEERING COMMITTEE****RESOLUTION ON WILDLAND URBAN INTERFACE FIRE**

Issue: Wildland fires continue to threaten lives, structures, infrastructure, watershed, community parklands, and other vital community assets, particularly in the wildland urban interface/intermix (WUI).

Adopted Policy: The National Association of Counties (NACo) calls on counties to enact better local land use ordinances and local fuels management policies for wildland fire protection in and around communities at risk of wildland fire and reaffirms its support for federal, state and local efforts to collaborate and cooperate on issues associated with fire in the WUI.

Background: Catastrophic wildland fires are one of the most significant threats to communities, forests, and wildlands throughout the nation. The catastrophic fires that occurred in Southern California in 2003 and throughout other western states and the southeast in recent years, provide a sobering look at the impacts fires have on public health and safety – jobs are lost, businesses and schools are impacted, infrastructure and environmental damages occur, and in the WUI lives, property and natural resources are threatened and often destroyed. These impacts leave citizens and government agencies faced with growing costs and losses from fire in the WUI. Four key factors contribute to this major problem:

A. **Population Growth.** People continue to migrate into high fire hazard zones. Homes are built on fuel-loaded slopes with minimum defensible space against wildland fires. Local government must ensure that growth is prudent, responsible and limits risk, to an acceptable level, and that development meets fire safe/firewise standards for both residents and the fire service.

B. **Increased Fuels.** Continued wildland fuel loading, higher tree density, and dead and dying trees due to insects and disease make fuel issues massive in scale. According to fire professionals and land managers, about millions of acres of private and federal land are at risk and have the potential to burn catastrophically.

C. **Vegetation Management.** To comply with environmental and regulatory agency requirements, fire professionals and land managers have increasing difficulty in conducting vegetation, watershed and forest management activities and programs. A large aspect of this is the decreased use of mechanical methods and prescribed fires for the removal of wildland fuels. NACo supports the collaboration on responsible and effective vegetation management plans already underway between local, state and federal agencies pursuant to the January 2003 Hazardous Fuels Memorandum of Understanding.

D. **Increased Costs Associated with Fire Suppression.** Both the increasing frequency of large damaging catastrophic wildland fires and the ever-increasing suppression costs and damages caused by these fires can be significantly reduced by: a) local

government policies, zoning, land use controls and building construction methods consistent with the tenets of the International Urban Wildland Interface Code; and b) with an aggressive vegetation fuels management program in these high-risk wildland fire areas.

To address the threats associated with catastrophic wildfires, the League of California Cities and the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) adopted a joint policy statement in February of 2004 declaring a "call to action" to implement a stronger defensive strategy to address the threat of wildland fire. By adopting this resolution, NACo joins CSAC in calling for counties to enact better local ordinances to improve land use regulation and fuels management policies for wildland fire protection concerns in the WUI.

Fiscal/Urban/Rural Impact: The 2003 Hayman fire in Colorado had direct costs (i.e. suppression, rehabilitation, etc.) amounting to \$207.7 million (\$1,508/acre) and indirect costs (i.e. lost property tax revenue, flood damage, lost wilderness/habitat, etc.) amounting to \$22 million (\$160/acre). Dr. Denny Lynch, Colorado State University, *Journal of Forestry*, September, 2004.

Risk reduction activities, on the other hand, cost about \$505/acre, according to a report by Snyder et al., Northern Arizona University/School of Forestry, June, 2003.

Adopted by the NACo Board of Directors

March 7, 2005

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