



# NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FORESTERS

444 North Capitol Street NW | Suite 387 | Washington, DC 20001 | [www.stateforesters.org](http://www.stateforesters.org)

March 2, 2026

The Honorable Glenn “GT” Thompson  
Chair, House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Angie Craig  
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture  
1010 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

## **Re: Modernization of the USDA Forest Service’s Volunteer Fire Assistance Program**

Dear Chairman Thompson and Ranking Member Craig:

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) is writing today in support of statutory improvements to the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978 to modernize the USDA Forest Service’s Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) Program. We applaud the efforts of Representative John Rose to bring this legislative need to the Committee’s attention and thank the Committee for their thoughtful consideration of these key statutory changes.

Since its inception in 1920, the NASF has served as a leading authority on forest management in the United States. State Foresters are the primary delivery system for forest and wildfire management activities nationwide. They conserve, enhance, and protect state and private forests, which encompass nearly two-thirds of the nation’s forests, and are responsible for wildfire protection on more than 1.1 billion acres. The roots of cooperative fire protection between state forestry agencies and the federal government trace back over a hundred years, underpinned by federal authorities provided by this Committee to achieve the necessary scale and coordination that is otherwise out of reach.

Today, the VFA program provides support to volunteer fire departments protecting our nation’s smaller communities with staffing that is mostly volunteer in nature. National needs assessment survey data shows that fire departments protecting smaller communities tend to lack adequate resources and rely more on volunteer staffing compared to departments protecting communities with larger populations. Fire departments that regularly respond to wildfires face particularly acute resource challenges as the equipment, training, and apparatus used to fight wildfire is almost entirely different from those used to fight structure fires. The VFA program helps bridge these resource gaps for thousands of fire departments across the country.

VFA ensures adequate capacity to respond to wildfires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes and property, and firefighters. This capacity is critical because these state and local

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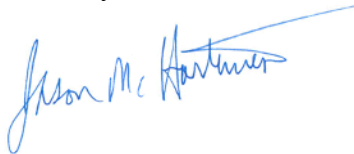
resources are the first responders to more than 80 percent of wildfires – whether on state, federal or private lands. In FY 2025, the VFA program provided aid to over 8,000 rural communities, trained more than 12,000 firefighters, expanded or organized 13 fire departments, and provided 3,800 grants totaling over \$15.3 million to these departments for the purchasing, rehabilitating, or maintaining of critical equipment.

However, the VFA program’s current requirements are over 40 years old, and do not adequately represent the full suite of today’s volunteer fire departments who need funding to protect the communities they serve from wildfire. The eligibility requirements for this program need to be updated and the authorizing language streamlined to keep up with changes occurring in volunteer fire departments as we see population shifts and other changes within local communities.

To expand and improve the accessibility of volunteer fire departments to complement state and federal assistance, the Committee should act to increase the qualifying community population threshold from 10,000 to 15,000, change the eligible percent volunteer (non-salaried) firefighting personnel from 80 percent to 70 percent, and allow for Secretarial discretion on waiving match requirement, similar to other fire and state and private forestry programs. These seemingly small changes to the program’s authorization allow more volunteer fire departments to benefit from the VFA program without meaningfully altering state-by-state allocation of dollars.

We again thank the Committee for their thoughtful consideration and stand ready to provide further information on this ask as needed.

Sincerely,



Jason Hartman  
President, National Association of State Foresters  
Kansas State Forester

CC: The Honorable John Rose