



September 24, 2020

Donald J. Trump  
 President of the United States of America  
 The White House  
 1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW  
 Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you today on behalf of the nation’s state foresters regarding a draft Executive Order (EO), which if implemented, would negatively affect wildfire suppression and emergency response operations nationwide. Specifically, this EO would prohibit the use of federally funded Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) manufactured in part or in whole by companies in “covered countries,” including China.

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) represents the directors of the state forestry agencies in all 50 states, eight U.S. territories, and the District of Columbia. By providing more than 270,000 technical assists to private landowners each year, and by directly managing 76 million acres of state-owned forestland, state foresters conserve, protect, and enhance more than two-thirds of all America’s forests and trees. State foresters and their agencies also work to improve the health, resilience, and productivity of federal lands through congressional authorities, such as Good Neighbor Authority, and provide wildfire protection on over 1.59 billion acres nationwide.

State forestry agencies and local and volunteer fire departments are able to detect and suppress wildfires more efficiently and safely with the help of UAS. In many instances, these entities are only able to obtain UAS with help from federal grants like those provided through the USDA Forest Service (USFS) State Fire Assistance and Volunteer Fire Assistance programs.

Together with federal partners at the USFS and Department of Interior, state and local firefighting agencies employ the Cohesive Strategy to prevent, mitigate, and to safely suppress wildfires across all land ownerships. This interagency cooperation means that most (75 percent in 2018 and 79 percent in 2019) of the wildland fire professionals mobilized to respond to wildfires burning on federal lands are state forestry agency staff. Currently, many of these response teams rely on the remote operation capabilities provided by UAS. UAS are also critical assets in carrying out prescribed fire to reduce the risk of wildfire, and they allow for getting more acres treated with lower risk to personnel on the ground. Banning the use of UAS on federal lands or their purchase with federal funds would increase the likelihood of catastrophic wildfire and severely diminish the efficacy of future wildfire suppression operations.

**Executive Director**  
 Jay Farrell

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State forestry agencies contribute a significant portion of the overall wildland fire suppression effort nationally in terms of resources, personnel, capacity, and funds. Collectively, states reported spending \$1.9 billion on fire suppression, prevention, and mitigation in 2018, with \$1.4 billion spent on suppression alone (state costs are not reimbursed by the federal government or later repaid by local governments). For context, the federal cost for fire suppression in 2018 was \$3.1 billion. State forestry agencies also provide local governments and volunteer fire departments with access to fire and emergency response resources, which in 2018, included 93,656 firefighters, 91,940 fire engines, 2,851 dozers, and 620 aircraft.

In 2019, states responded to over 39,000 wildfires that burned 1.8 million acres and UAS were indispensable on many of these, especially hundreds of the largest fires. Utilization of UAS by state forestry agencies and other emergency response agencies continues to expand in wildfire operations to include supporting training efforts, search and rescue operations, aerial surveillance of wildfires, and early detection and response capabilities. Use of UAS helps protect our communities, as well as our firefighters.

While we understand the administration's concern for cyber security, a broad country-of-origin ban on UAS technology would likely come with significant and negative unintended consequences for public safety. Due to the lack of availability of drones and/or drone parts that are not from covered foreign entities, state agencies would not be able to adhere to this EO and still maintain the same level of wildfire response capabilities. We respectfully request the administration consider alternative options and/or an exemption to such a ban for all federal, state, and local emergency response and wildfire response agencies.

Sincerely,



Greg Josten  
President, The National Association of State Foresters  
South Dakota State Forester

CC:

The Honorable Michael Kratsios, Chief Technology Officer of the United States  
The Honorable Dr. Peter Navarro, Assistant to the President & Director of the Office of Trade & Manufacturing Policy  
The Honorable Mr. Larry Kudlow, Assistant to the President for Economic Policy and Director of the National Economic Council  
The Honorable Christopher Liddell, Assistant to the President and Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy Coordination  
Mr. Russell Vought, Director of the Office of Management and Budget