

5. POLICY POSITION

URGING THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT CONTROL MEASURES FOR SOUTHERN PINE BEETLE INFESTATION IN WILDERNESS AREAS OF THE SOUTHERN NATIONAL FORESTS

BACKGROUND

The southern pine beetle (SPB) is the most destructive insect in the southern forest. The uncontrolled beetle infestation in the federal wilderness areas of the South are now escaping to private forest lands, as well as becoming "beetle factories" for adjacent national forest lands. The federal wilderness areas in the South are relatively small, fragmented areas often intermingled with the private forest lands, thereby subjecting these private holdings to federal insects, disease and fires. This massive beetle infestation is destroying timber values estimated at \$3,000 - \$4,000 per acre on federal lands in a time when the timber supply nationwide is a concern.

Authority to control insect, disease and fires is provided by the 1964 Wilderness Act. When infestation is within 1/4 mile of the wilderness boundaries and when the SPB infestation threatens resources outside a wilderness area or a federally listed endangered species, action can be taken.

It is noted, however, that in spite of these criteria, approximately 10 SPB infestations have crossed onto private land.

Therefore, the potential for disastrous wildfires in these areas of dead and dying timber is also a major concern. The Southern Legislative Conference members are concerned about the "no control" policy stance of the U.S. Forest Service in regard to the control of massive beetle populations within the wilderness boundaries and the implications of this policy for the private forest lands of all the southern states. Such concerns have been expressed by the state foresters of Texas, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.

RECOMMENDATION

The Southern Legislative Conference takes the position that it is unconscionable for the federal government to allow massive beetle populations to go uncontrolled within areas adjacent to private forest lands. The Southern Legislative Conference calls upon the U.S. Forest Service and the U.S. Congress to immediately apply existing authority and to revise their evasive policy so as to require the initiation of southern pine beetle control efforts and the salvaging of beetle killed or dying timber on the wilderness areas of the southern states to prevent further southern pine beetle spread, disastrous wildfires and protect endangered species.

Adopted by the Southern Legislative Conference, July 19, 1994, Norfolk, Virginia.