

Hardwood Federation Update

*By Dana Lee Cole
Hardwood Federation Executive Director*

These days in Washington D.C., there seems to be a lot of shouting and not much listening being done. There are, however, opportunities to engage policymakers wholisten, and it's important to take advantage of every such occasion.

In early December, the Hardwood Federation was invited to participate in a roundtable discussion convened by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior, Ryan Zinke, and Sonny Perdue, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The topic was **wildfire**, and how the Agriculture and Interior departments can better work together to prevent and address the forest fire issue on federal lands.

Also attending were U.S. Forest Chief Tony Tooke, Congressman Rob Bishop - Chairman of the House Committee on Natural Resources, and Congressman Bruce Westerman, the only registered forester in Congress, and the primary author of Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2017 (and 2015!).

Additionally, associations and individuals concerned about the millions of acres being devastated by forest fire each year, and dedicated to identifying new and existing methods of preventing the ignition and spread of forest fires were invited to participate.

Representatives from the following groups were present and contributed to the discussion:

The American Forest Foundation	The National Wild Turkey Federation
The National Association of State Foresters	The National Association of Home Builders
The Forest Resources Association	The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
The Federal Forest Resource Coalition	The Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
The American Forest Resource Council	The Intermountain Forest Association
The American Loggers Council	The Montana Wood Products Association
The National Cattlemen's Beef Association	

(Also present, a wide assortment of high level staff from both the Interior and Agriculture departments, although their role was primarily one of listening to industry input.)

A number of good ideas were raised and discussed - everything from increasing communications between local, state and federal foresters and firefighters, to increasing the use of technology to assess areas under threat to allow quicker action. The important role loggers can play in identifying and stemming fire spread was also raised.

Of primary interest to the Hardwood Federation was of course, the use and expansion of sustainable timber salvaging, harvesting, and thinning practices to decrease the fuel loads on the ground, which can prevent wildfires from occurring and help slow them once they

start. This issue was discussed in depth and, as you would expect, was pretty much a point of agreement among the participants.

It was interesting to me that the Cattlemen have very similar issues to the forest industry. Fuel (in the form of dry feed grasses) collects on private, state and federal lands; however, clearing out these fuels from federal lands is difficult due to the rules and regulations governing grazing on these lands.

Also talked about at length - the struggles to identify and pass a funding fix to the fire suppression budget. While there are votes in the House to pass legislation, the Senate continues to be a struggle, with multiple approaches under consideration.

The group as a whole sent a strong message that fixing the funding mechanism without including management reform was not acceptable...something the Secretaries agreed was important.

I share this overview with you not to suggest that a solution is imminent, but to show that the hardwood industry has a wide and varied number of allies in our efforts to increase timber harvest levels, prevent devastating forest fires, and improve forest health at all levels. Also extremely important to note is that the industry does have a very open line of communication with two departments that have a strong personal and professional interest in our issues, and are ready and willing to listen and to take action.

And the conversation apparently did not stop at the door of the meeting room. Following our meeting, Secretary Perdue had lunch at the White House with the President and Vice President. Administration officials report that they talked wildfires, and that Secretary Perdue recapped our roundtable discussion from earlier that morning.

Going forward, Cary, Pat and I will indeed consider how we can further develop these relationships and share more of the Hardwood industry's perspective with Administration leadership. I have no doubt that we will be reaching out to HMA members for thoughts and ideas...so be prepared!!!

Until then, THANK YOU for your support and engagement in 2017. And here's to a great 2018!