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**BUSH ADMINISTRATION PROPOSES INCREASED FUNDING FOR FY 2006 TO  
MAINTAIN AND RESTORE FOREST AND RANGELAND HEALTH**  
*Healthy Forest Projects Would Continue to Reduce Wildfire Threat*

WASHINGTON, Feb. 3, 2005—Agriculture Under Secretary Mark Rey and Interior Assistant Secretary Lynn Scarlett today announced that President Bush is including more than \$867 million in the fiscal year 2006 budget to continue implementation of his Healthy Forests Initiative.

“This significant budget increase, along with the new tools afforded under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, would allow federal land management agencies to continue to improve the health of millions of acres in our forests and rangelands,” said Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Mark Rey. “The President’s budget provides funding to advance our long-term restoration strategy of treating the right acres, in the right place and at the right time.”

"Over the past four years, Interior agencies and the Forest Service have forged strong partnerships with States, Tribes, communities, and citizens to thin vegetation on over 11 million acres of forests and rangelands," said Assistant Secretary of the Interior Lynn Scarlett. "In 2004 alone, we removed hazardous fuels from 1.8 million acres of lands adjacent to communities, a 130 percent increase in acres treated in the wildland urban interface as part of the National Fire Plan compared with 2001."

The President’s budget request funds activities that advance the goals of the Healthy Forests Initiative, including activities authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act that will result in improved forest and rangeland management, healthier landscapes, and reduced risk of catastrophic wildfires.

The \$867 million budget proposal, more than a \$56 million increase over FY 2005, takes an integrated approach to reducing hazardous fuels and restoring forest and rangeland health. The fuels reduction program will be integrated with programs that support wildlife habitat improvements, watershed enhancements, vegetation management, stewardship timber harvest and forest health research to achieve more comprehensive and effective results in our forests and rangelands.

The Healthy Forests Initiative FY 2006 budget will reduce hazardous fuel loads and insect infestation on nearly 4.3 million acres, up from 1.2 million acres in 2000. More than 50 percent of the 2006 acres will be in the wildland-urban interface. By the end of FY 2006, federal agencies will have removed hazardous fuels from more than 19 million acres of our nation’s forests and rangelands since the beginning of FY 2001.

President Bush introduced the Healthy Forests Initiative in August 2002 during one of the most destructive wildfire seasons in 50 years. The President later signed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act on Dec. 3, 2003, which streamlines the administrative procedures and appeals process and provides Federal courts direction when reviewing fuel reduction or forest health projects. Additional information on the Healthy Forest Initiative is available at <http://www.healthyforests.gov>.

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