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U.S. Forest Service, counties must work together to mitigate wildfire

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Sallie Clark, second vice president of the National Association of Counties (NACo), today told a U.S. Senate panel “healthy forests and pre-fire mitigation efforts” are the only answers to help mitigate the threats of wildfires and floods on public lands and private property across the country.

Clark, commissioner, El Paso County, Colo., testified before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry subcommittee on Conservation, Forestry and Natural Resources. The hearing, “Shortchanging Our Forests: How Tight Budgets and Management Decisions Can Increase the Risk of Wildfire,” featured testimony from local Colorado business and government representatives from wildfire-affected areas. The subcommittee is chaired by Sen. Michael Bennet (D-Colo.).

“I want to stress the need for more investment in mitigation and the importance of having the Forest Service working together with local officials to make the most of that investment,” Clark said. “Fires and devastating and destructive flash floods have no respect for city, county, state and federal boundaries, private property lines, critical public safety and utilities infrastructure or potential loss of life.”

Clark, whose county was devastated last year by the Waldo Canyon Fire, said she was encouraged to see the introduction of bipartisan legislation that would give local officials the flexibility needed to do fire mitigation in a manner that will ensure the greatest return on their investment.

“We need to mitigate the greatest threats for fires and floods, whether they are on public lands or private property and we need the flexibility to partner and collaborate with multiple agencies, jurisdictions and land owners to get the job done,” Clark said. “And, local input is a key to understanding the needs of communities.”

Click here is read her full testimony. For more information, contact Ryan Yates at 202.942.4207.

The National Association of Counties (NACo) assists America’s counties in pursuing excellence in public service by advancing sound public policy, promoting peer learning and accountability, fostering intergovernmental and public-private collaboration and providing value-added services to save counties and taxpayers money.

Founded in 1935, NACo provides the elected and appointed leaders from the nation’s 3,069 counties with the knowledge, skills and tools necessary to provide fiscally responsible, quality-driven and results-oriented policies and services for healthy, vibrant, safe and resilient counties.