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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2011

NR # 20110927

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Presidential Honor Awarded to USDA Forest Products Laboratory Scientist

MADISON, Wis.— President Obama named USDA Forest Products Laboratory (FPL) engineer Samuel Zelinka as a recipient of the Presidential Early Career Awards for Scientists and Engineers. Zelinka is one of 94 recipients for the 2011 award, the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on science and engineering professionals in the early stages of their independent research careers.

“It is inspiring to see the innovative work being done by these scientists and engineers as they ramp up their careers—careers that I know will be not only personally rewarding but also invaluable to the Nation,” President Obama said. “That so many of them are also devoting time to mentoring and other forms of community service speaks volumes about their potential for leadership, not only as scientists but as model citizens.”

Zelinka is a research materials engineer in FPL’s Durability and Wood Protection Research unit. He conducts fundamental research on how wood reacts to water and also studies the corrosion of metals in wood. He has also developed several time-saving methods to evaluate how metal fasteners react in new preservative formulations for treated wood. Zelinka’s research directly contributes to FPL’s work on obtaining the economic and environmental benefits of using wood and wood products in green building construction.

The award is the first of its kind to be awarded to an FPL scientist. “We are very proud of Sam and his scientific accomplishments,” says FPL Acting Director Ted Wegner. “His diligence and dedication to research are reflected by this honor, and will serve him well as his career progresses.”

A graduate of the University of Wisconsin, Zelinka is passionate about what he does. “I have a great job. I get to explore phenomena that are not, and have never been, understood,” he explains. “And I have the freedom to choose how I want to probe these questions. It’s addicting.”

The Presidential early career awards embody the high priority the Obama Administration places on producing outstanding scientists and engineers to advance the Nation’s goals, tackle grand challenges, and contribute to the American economy. Sixteen Federal departments and agencies join together annually to nominate the most meritorious scientists and engineers whose early accomplishments show the greatest promise for assuring America’s preeminence in science and engineering and contributing to the awarding agencies’ missions.

The awards, established by President Clinton in 1996, are coordinated by the Office of Science and Technology Policy within the Executive Office of the President. Awardees are selected for their pursuit of innovative research at the frontiers of science and technology and their

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commitment to community service as demonstrated through scientific leadership, public education, or community outreach.

The Forest Products Laboratory was established in 1910 to conserve and extend the country's wood resources. FPL's work with academia, industry, and other government agencies has led to myriad ground-breaking discoveries with great benefit to the public it serves. Additional information on FPL's research is available at www.fpl.fs.fed.us.

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