

Fiscal Year 2015 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Budget
Society of American Foresters
House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
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The Society of American Foresters (SAF), with more than 12,000 professionals working across all segments of the forestry profession, promotes science-based sustainable management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests. Funding for the US Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of Interior (DOI) is vitally important to sustaining our nation's forests.

The 751 million acres of forests in the US are subject to unprecedented pressures from wildfires, insects, disease, and invasive species. The public relies on forests for clean water and air, recreational opportunities, forest products, and scenic values. Land management agencies must manage threats while still providing for multiple uses and ecosystem services. Maintaining this balance demands that federal land managers identify innovative ways to maximize the rate of return when considering investments to improve the health of America's forests.

This testimony highlights SAF's top priorities in the FY 2015 budget process. These priorities impact a range of programs within USFS and DOI budgets. Recognizing budgetary constraints, these requests will assist forest managers to sustain our nation's forests and provide a multitude of benefits for generations to come.

SAF priorities include:

1. Adoption of a new approach to wildfire suppression funding that features flexible spending caps for emergency wildfire suppression costs in addition to funding the USFS and DOI Hazardous Fuels Programs at a level that is sufficient to conduct fuels reduction projects to reduce wildfire risks on federal, state, and private lands
2. Increased funding levels for USFS Research and Development (R&D) to no less than \$231 million and no less than \$72 million for the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA)
3. Funding the Forest Health Management Program (FHP) as a consolidated USFS State and Private Forestry budget line item at no less than \$111 million.
4. Continued support for the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program at no less than \$40 million
5. Removal of the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund sunset provision set to go into effect in FY 2015

SAF represents forestry professionals working on public and private forests across the United States. SAF members are interested in working with the federal agencies and Congress to identify reasonable solutions to facilitate increasing the pace of management on federal lands.

Since 1910, the US's forest area has been relatively stable, with a slight increase in the last two decades.¹ The current volume of annual timber growth is 32 percent higher than the volume of annual removals, but in 2014, 90 percent of the timber harvested in the United States came from private forest lands.²

SAF is pleased that the Administration recognizes the need for management of federal lands, and set a harvest target of three billion board feet for FY 2015. However, SAF has concerns with the use of the consolidated Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) Line Item to reach this goal. SAF continues to support the IRR Pilot, but worries that IRR is not the appropriate mechanism to facilitate functional restoration on this scale.

With 65 to 82 million acres in the National Forest System (NFS) in need of restoration and total US timber harvests at the lowest levels since the 1960s, SAF encourages the USFS to seize this opportunity to implement more projects on federal lands.³ The volume generated from these projects will help to satisfy increased demand for construction and wood products while also improving the health and resilience of our nation's forests.

SAF Budget Recommendations

Appropriating dollars for federal land management agencies is not enough because successful implementation of USFS and DOI programs is predicated on finding an alternative to how fire suppression activities are managed and funded. In the span of only two years – FY 2012 and 2013 – the agencies were forced to transfer more than \$1 billion that Congress had appropriated to other priority programs to fund fire suppression. Changing the fire funding structure and a commitment to fund the Hazardous Fuels Programs at the USFS and DOI will prevent future transfers and assist the agencies in achieving land management objectives. ***SAF encourages the subcommittee to avoid transfers in FY 2015 by including language similar to what is included in the bi-partisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, introduced in the House and Senate (H.R. 3992 & S. 1875) in the FY 2015 House Appropriations Bill.***

A balanced approach to averting threats posed by fire is imperative. The Hazardous Fuels Line Items in the USFS and DOI budgets are integral to restoring forest health and resilience and reducing the costs of wildfire suppression. SAF members appreciate this subcommittee's consistent support for wildfire management and encourage the subcommittee to allocate funds to address fire risks inside and outside the wildland urban interface. Directing funds to treat areas

¹ US Forest Service (USFS). 2007. *U.S. Forest Resource Facts and Historical Trends*. Available online at <http://fia.fs.fed.us/library/brochures/docs/Forest%20Facts%201952-2007%20English%20rev072411.pdf>; last accessed April 2015.

² US Forest Service (USFS). 2010. *National Report on Sustainable Forests—2010*. Available online at http://www.fs.fed.us/research/sustain/2010SustainabilityReport/documents/2010_SustainabilityReport.pdf; last accessed April 2015.

³ US Forest Service (USFS). 2010. *National Report on Sustainable Forests—2010*. Available online at http://www.fs.fed.us/research/sustain/2010SustainabilityReport/documents/2010_SustainabilityReport.pdf; last accessed April 2015.

outside of the wildland urban interface will reduce the costs associated with suppression and in certain instances the intensity of wildfires after outbreak. ***SAF supports consolidating hazardous fuels funding in the USFS and DOI Hazardous Fuels Programs with \$479 million allocated for USFS and \$178 million allocated for DOI.***

Investments in forestry research are investments in the future health and sustainability of the nation's forests. USFS R&D conducts essential research on disturbances, forest ecosystems, species and forest resilience, treatment methods for controlling forest insects, diseases, and invasive species, renewable energy development and woody biomass conversion technology, and forest products and technology. SAF is concerned that the forestry research capacity in the US continues to decline, threatening US competitiveness and the ability of forest managers to meet tomorrow's challenges with current science and technical information. ***SAF supports a funding level of \$231 million for USFS R&D with particular emphasis on prioritizing research efforts and transferring knowledge to forestry professionals working in the field.***

USFS R&D Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program is the backbone of US forestry, providing the only national census of forests across all ownerships. Through FIA, USFS (partnering with state forestry agencies and the private sector) collects and analyzes forest data to assess trends on issues such as forest health and management, fragmentation and parcelization, and forest carbon sequestration. The data and information collected by FIA serves as the basis for: identifying trends in forest ownership; assessing fish and wildlife habitat; evaluating wildfire, insect, and disease risk; predicting the spread of invasive species; determining capital investment in existing forest products facilities and selecting locations for new forest product facilities; and identifying and responding to priorities identified in State Forest Action Plans. FIA data also evaluates forest disturbance risks, such as wildfire, insects and disease, and spread of invasive species. ***SAF members urge this subcommittee to reverse the spending cuts to FIA and requests funding in FY 2015 at a level of at least \$72 million.***

USFS State and Private Forestry (S&PF) allocations support sustainable forestry on public and private lands. SAF strongly supports funding S&PF programs to work in cooperation with the States to provide assistance to private landowners who own more than 50 percent of the forestland in the United States. The consolidated S&PF Forest Health Management programs (FHP) manage forest health through direct action on the NFS lands and provide assistance to other federal agencies, state and local agencies, and private landowners to prevent and mitigate insect and disease outbreaks as well as the spread of invasive species. ***SAF recommends funding FHP at the FY 2012 enacted funding levels of \$111 million to continue monitoring and responding to forest health concerns.***

SAF remains committed to the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLR). CFLR encourages collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration on priority forest landscapes.⁴ In four years, the twenty-three selected projects have reduced hazardous fuels, generated timber receipts, and provided a boost to rural economies.⁵ ***To ensure CFLR's***

⁴ US Forest Service. 2012. *Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program*. US Forest Service Website. Accessible online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/restoration/CFLR/index.shtml>; last accessed April 2015.

⁵ US Forest Service 2014. *Fiscal Year 2015 President's Budget Justification*. Available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/aboutus/budget/2015/FS15-FS-Budget-Justification.pdf>; last accessed April 2015.

continued success, SAF supports a \$40 million dollar funding level and consideration of additional funds for the program if available.

In closing SAF would like to highlight a final issue of concern. SAF members were delighted with the return of the Bureau of Land Management Public Domain Forestry Program (PD) to FY 2012 funding levels as a part of the 2014 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. However, SAF members are troubled by the pending loss of the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund, commonly referred to as the 5900 account. This fund allows PD to use a portion of the receipts from sales of timber and wood products on BLM lands not returned to the neighboring counties to fund management activities. This permanent operating fund created in the Appropriations Act of 1993 expires at the end of FY 2015. After FY 2015, all receipts used to continue management and restoration activities on the PD will be returned to the federal treasury. This loss of revenue will leave few dollars in the tight PD budget for planning, preparing, implementing, and monitoring forest ecosystem restoration activities. ***SAF recognizes that permanent operating fund accounts should be periodically evaluated for elimination, but the 5900 account reduces overhead and budgeted dollars required to operate PD should be reauthorized and not allowed to expire at the end of FY 2015.***

SAF appreciates this opportunity to share these important requests.