

Statement of David Forsell, Board President, Alliance for Community Trees  
To the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Subcommittee  
Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives  
On the President's FY 2015 Budget Proposals  
For the USDA Forest Service, Urban & Community Forestry Program  
April 10, 2014

SUMMARY OF REQUESTS

USDA Forest Service

- Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program at \$31.3 million
- Forest and Rangeland Research at \$298 million, including \$72 million for Forest Inventory and Analysis

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

- Recognize the Urban Waters Federal Partnership in funding for EPA clean water initiatives

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

My name is Dave Forsell and I am the President of Keep Indianapolis Beautiful, a non-profit organization whose mission is to engage diverse communities and create vibrant public places, helping people and nature thrive in our community, often helping people plant and care for trees. I am here today to testify on behalf of the Alliance for Community Trees (ACTrees), for whom I serve as President of the Board of Directors. ACTrees is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 1993 by leaders of local tree organizations to establish a national voice for urban and community forestry. ACTrees' founders shared a vision of urban trees and ecosystems nurtured by a broad base of community stewards. Through the efforts of 200 member and program partner organizations in 44 states, over 5 million volunteers have been inspired to plant and care for 15 million trees across our nation, in cities and towns where 83 percent of Americans live.

My testimony will focus on the critical role of the USDA Forest Service in providing federal leadership for and assistance to public and private partners at the national, state and local levels through its Urban & Community Forestry (U&CF) program and urban forestry research.

*Why the Forest Service's U&CF Program and urban forestry research are important to ACTrees*

The Forest Service's U&CF program and urban forestry research projects have been models of working with each other through an integrated approach and partnering with public and private organizations at the national, state and local levels to provide information and tools that partners need to effectively plan and implement urban forestry management programs. The integration between Forest Service program staff and researchers has been essential to address the many issues affecting urban trees and forests and the rapid pace of change in urban environments. In addition, the collaborative approaches of Forest Service program staff and researchers have been critical to open and sharing relationships with partners and adaptive learning and management.

ACTrees members have benefited from both the technical and financial assistance provided by the U&CF program and the information and tools developed by urban forestry researchers. Many of our members have worked directly with Forest Service program staff and researchers on

projects in their communities. Others have benefited from Forest Service resources provided through state forestry agencies—the U&CF program’s primary partner. While some ACTrees members may not receive assistance from the Forest Service or through state forestry agencies, all members benefit from the urban forestry partnerships the Forest Service has helped create.

ACTrees members recognize the importance of broad partnerships to advance common goals around urban trees and forests. Partnerships among public and private organizations enable sharing of expertise, skills, and resources. Such partnerships result in substantial leveraging of federal funding provided to local urban and community forestry projects. ACTrees members partner with a diverse range of agencies and organizations at the local level. At the national level, ACTrees works with public and private partners to advance urban and community forestry through collaborative initiatives such as the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition and the Partners in Community Forestry conferences organized by the Arbor Day Foundation.

An open and collaborative U&CF program has enabled federal, state and local partners to develop a great diversity of projects around the country, recognizing the wide range of ecosystem types and unique social, cultural and economic contexts in communities across the nation. Here are a few examples of projects on which ACTrees member organizations have worked to add value to their communities—neighborhood value, environmental value, cost savings, employment and training. Such stories are happening in cities and towns across America thanks to broad public-private partnerships in urban and community forestry:

- Tree Pittsburgh received a grant from the USDA Forest Service in 2011, through the state’s Bureau of Forestry, to create the City’s first Urban Forest Master Plan. It has leveraged the federal grant and is developing the Plan, which includes detailed information, resources needed, and recommendations to proactively manage and grow a city’s tree canopy.
- The Tennessee Urban Forestry Council established a Greenprint initiative in 1991 to promote federal, state and local partnerships toward a strategic goal of doubling the state’s urban forest canopy. The initiative continues to build on its vision and collaborative strategies.
- The Sacramento Tree Foundation is engaged in cooperative research efforts with the U.S. Forest Service and California’s forestry agency to explore the relationships between human health and tree canopy cover.
- The Morton Arboretum near Chicago is cooperating with the USDA Forest Service’s National Institute of Applied Science on an Urban Forest Climate Adaptation project.
- The California Urban Forest Council and California ReLeaf are working to advance urban forestry projects through the state’s climate change legislation and policies, recently seeking \$18 million in cap-and-trade funding for urban forestry projects in underserved communities.
- Tree People in Los Angeles is advancing innovative projects to address drought impacts on trees, such as using recycled water from treatment plants to water trees in urban parks.

In Indianapolis, the power of community and urban forestry is very real! Due to an EPA consent decree, our local water utility, Citizens Energy Group, is spending more than \$1 billion to eliminate all but 5% of raw sewage overflows into our river and streams. My organization, Keep Indianapolis Beautiful (KIB), is partnering with Citizens in a pilot program in a west side

neighborhood. KIB will be installing 34 beautiful stormwater planters up and down neighborhood streets as part of a stormwater sewer separation project. They'll be planted with 10,000 native perennials and grasses, adding value to front yards; and 200 trees will be added to the landscape for their power to mitigate stormwater runoff. This 100% green solution will save Citizens considerable dollars compared to a standard gray solution. The best part? This work is supporting jobs and training for high school and college students who'll plant and tend trees; they'll also have an opportunity to work alongside engineers and ecological services professionals in the process.

### *Why the U&CF Program and urban forestry research are critical to the federal government*

In recent years, policymakers and natural resource managers have been calling attention to the increasing importance of urban areas as we look to the future. Our nation's cities, towns, and metropolitan centers present critical challenges and opportunities as our population centers grow. The Forest Service's U&CF program and urban forestry research are uniquely positioned in the federal government to help address urban challenges and opportunities as they relate to environmental and natural resource issues—particularly those related to the roles of urban trees and forests as assets for: building and restoring green space and parks for recreation, supporting opportunities for green businesses and jobs in underserved neighborhoods, and providing environmental services essential to community well-being and quality of life, such as clean water, clean air, energy conservation, stormwater management, and atmospheric carbon exchange. No other federal agency has the expertise and can provide the leadership necessary to help our nation address urban challenges and opportunities with trees and forests.

The Forest Service has recognized the U&CF program as the key program to help achieve one of seven priority goals in its current strategic plan. Goal 6 is “Engaging Urban America with Forest Service Programs.” Similarly, the Forest Service Research branch has identified Urban Natural Resources Research as one of seven Priority Research Areas. Looking to the future—as reflected in the agency's *2010 Resources Planning Act Assessment* and *2010 National Report on Sustainable Forests*—urban forests will become increasingly important for providing environmental services to our nation's growing urban populations. In addition, as part of the USDA, the Forest Service's U&CF program is particularly well-positioned to help address increasingly important urban-rural challenges, including the expansion of urban populations into rural landscapes and the lack of opportunities for urban youth to connect to nature.

### *ACTrees' Recommendations*

**Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF):** There are more than 100 million acres of urban forest lands across the nation, providing essential environmental, social, and economic services such as energy conservation, improved air and water quality, recreation and improved public health to the more than 83 percent of our nation's population who live in cities and communities. The Forest Service's U&CF program is the primary federal program that reaches out and provides technical and financial assistance to local communities and non-profit groups for planting,

maintaining, protecting, and restoring these urban forests. In FY 2013, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,292 communities and nearly 198 million people, over 60 percent of the U.S. population.

ACTrees urges the Subcommittee to provide \$31.3 million for the U&CF program in FY 2015, consistent with the level enacted in FY 2012. The President's FY 2015 proposal for U&CF is \$23.7 million, a further reduction from the FY 2014 enacted level of \$28 million. While the President's FY 2015 proposal holds promise for additional funding for urban and community forestry projects through the Forest Service's new Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program, ACTrees has much to learn about these opportunities. In addition, ACTrees is excited about the President's proposal for a \$1 billion Climate Resilience Fund, which includes \$25 million for the U&CF program to advance urban forestry projects as measures to help communities adapt to and mitigate climate change impacts.

Urban Forestry Research: The Forest Service Research branch has provided essential information and tools to urban forestry groups and practitioners. It is critical for communities to obtain baseline information about their urban forests before they can plan and implement actions. There have been huge strides made in recent years in developing new technologies and tools, such as the *i-Tree* program, for mapping the urban forest and examining conditions and trends. Similarly, urban forestry research has been helping policymakers and practitioners to understand the environmental, economic, and social services that trees and forests provide.

ACTrees urges the Subcommittee to provide funding for Forest and Rangeland Research at \$298 million for FY 2015. This reflects a funding level for basic forest research at \$226 million, consistent with FY 2014, and funding for Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) at \$72 million. While there is no budget line item for urban forestry research, the Forest Service has recognized "Urban Natural Resources Stewardship" as one of its seven Priority Research Areas. We urge the Subcommittee to recognize the importance of urban forestry research and direct the agency to provide strong funding in this area, as it did in its FY 2014 report language. With our request for \$72 million for FIA, ACTrees has joined many partners in the conservation community recognizing the importance of inventory and assessment information in supporting forest policy and management decisions in all contexts, including urban and community forests.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Urban Waters Federal Partnership: Launched in 2011, this Federal Partnership has expanded to 18 pilot cities and includes 14 Federal agencies. EPA coordinates this important and innovative Partnership through its Office of Water and the Forest Service participates on behalf of USDA, providing essential tree and forest expertise. The Partnership aims to stimulate regional and local economies, create local jobs, improve quality of life, and protect Americans' health by revitalizing urban waterways in underserved communities across the nation. ACTrees urges the Subcommittee to recognize this important Federal Partnership through its FY 2015 funding of EPA clean water initiatives.

I appreciate your consideration, and the opportunity to testify today on behalf of ACTrees.