

Testimony of Tom Martin, President & CEO, American Forest Foundation
For the House Appropriations Committee:
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and related Agencies
April 10, 2014

Investments in the US Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program and the US Forest Service Forest Health Protection Program will help family forest owners get ahead of increasing threats from invasive pests and pathogens, wildfire, and development pressures. Complementing these efforts, the Landscape Scale Restoration Program provides an innovative approach to target resources for maximum impact, meaning support for this program will ensure measurable outcomes on the ground. It is also critical that funding for US Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis and overall Forest Service Research and Development programs are improved and maintained, so these programs continue to provide the information and technical resources for landowners to make informed decisions about America's forests. The American Forest Foundation (AFF) urges the Subcommittee to:

- Support the U.S. Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program at the FY12 funding level of \$29 million;
- Support the U.S. Forest Service Forest Health Protection (Federal and Cooperative) at the FY12 funding level of \$111 million;
- Support the President's funding request of \$23.513 million for the Landscape Scale Restoration Program;
- Support the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program at \$72 million, toward providing an updated inventory of America's forests; and
- Support the U.S. Forest Service Research and Development Program at the FY12 funding level of \$231 million.

We also ask the Subcommittee to support a solution to the wildfire funding problem. The mounting cost of wildfire suppression activities over the past few years have far suppressed budgeted appropriations, forcing the U.S. Forest Service to transfer hundreds of millions of dollars from non-fire accounts to pay for suppression. This halts other mission-critical forest health and stewardship activities from taking place, all of which work toward preventing the future threat of catastrophic fire.

Investments in forestry programs will help strengthen rural communities, support rural jobs, and ensure that communities that rely on the clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and forest products from family-owned forests, don't face additional costs for these goods and services.

Unfortunately, new data suggests that by 2020, more than 18 million acres of family forests are threatened by housing development. Furthermore, almost 14 million acres are at risk of mortality due to insects and disease, while 29 million are at high or very high risk of destruction from wildfire.¹ At the same time, less than 15% of family forest owners have sought

¹ Family Forest Research Center, 2014 Preliminary Data

professional advice for the stewardship of their forests. Many are under the impression that leaving their woods alone is the best option. It is therefore essential we ensure these families have tools, technical information, and policy support to keep their forests as forests, for current and future generations.

The American Forest Foundation is a nonprofit conservation organization that works on the ground with more than 22 million family woodland owners through a variety of programs, including the American Tree Farm System®, to protect the values and benefits of America's family forests, with clear ecological and economic impact.

Families and individuals steward more of America's forests than the federal government or corporations. Families and individuals own 35 percent of our nation's forests.² These private forests provide myriad public benefits—clean air, clean water, recreation, renewable resources that build our homes and communities, and good-paying rural jobs.

Forest Health Investments Needed

The threats are daunting. Close to 500 species of tree-damaging pests from other countries have become established in the country, and a new one is introduced, on average, every 2 to 3 years. The USFS Forest Health Protection (FHP) Program is a critical resource supporting efforts to prevent, contain, and eradicate dangerous pests and pathogens affecting trees and forests. The program provides critical assistance to other federal agencies, state agencies, local agencies and private landowners.

In FY 2013, the FHP Program combated pests on over 285,000 acres of Federal lands and over 444,000 acres of Cooperative lands. Funding cuts meant 321,000 fewer acres were treated on Cooperative lands in FY 2013 than in FY 2011. Any further cuts to this program will necessitate deeper reductions in support for communities already facing outbreaks and expose more of the nation's family-owned forests to the devastating and costly effects of the Asian Longhorned Beetle, Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Thousand Cankers Disease, Western Bark Beetle and other pests.

Invest in a more focused, impactful Forest Stewardship Program

Over the last few years, there have been significant cut backs in outreach and technical assistance provided to woodland owners, as agency budgets have shrunk, and industry has cut back or eliminated their outreach foresters. This greatly concerns woodland owners across the country, who rely on programs like the Forest Stewardship Program and state forest agency service foresters. The Forest Stewardship Program has been the backbone of the American Tree Farm System, providing the support to woodland owners to ensure they have management plans for certification and can subsequently access certified wood product markets.

² USDA, May 2008, *Who Owns America's Forests?*

These cuts are also of great concern because of the growing number of “unengaged” woodland owners—those 95% of woodland owners who are not actively managing their land, and therefore have forests that are more susceptible to the threats mentioned above.

To address some of this loss, AFF is currently piloting, together with several state forest agencies, conservation groups, and industry partners, a number of innovative landowner outreach tools, using micro-targeting and social marketing strategies, to more efficiently and effectively engage “unengaged” woodland owners. To date, we’ve seen a 12% response rate, compared with a 3-4% response rate that forest agencies, extension agents, and organizations typically see.

Tools like these, combined with a more focused Forest Stewardship Program that concentrates on landowner outreach and assistance in priority areas like those identified in each state’s Forest Action Plan, have significant potential to leverage the Forest Stewardship Program further and lead to even greater impact on the ground.

Support the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, targeting outcomes in critical areas

To complement the ongoing work of the Forest Stewardship Program and further target measurable outcomes in high-priority areas, AFF strongly urges the Subcommittee to provide support for the relatively new Landscape Scale Restoration program.

Partners, such as the American Forest Foundation, can leverage the work of this State and Private Forestry Program to maximize on-the-ground impact and engage landowners in targeted forest conservation activities. With this program, the USFS is well-positioned to address the most pressing threats, protect the many public benefits we all enjoy from forests, and leverage federal efforts for meaningful, measurable impact.

Maintaining Essential Information for Forest Management of Family-Owned Woodlands

All of these programs must be grounded in the sound science and sound forest information provided by the US Forest Service’s Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) Program and the Research and Development Programs (R&D). These programs provide irreplaceable data about our forests and give landowners the tools to know how to manage the growing threats they face.

As our nation’s forest census, the FIA program provides critical updates on forest health and market trends—better equipping forest owners nationwide to mitigate the impact of impending threats and concerns. FIA also provides a census of the trends in family forest ownership, demographics, and trends, so we can better understand how to work with this significant ownership group, most of whom, as mentioned above are “unengaged” in active forest management.

In particular, the USFS Research and Development Program provides the science to help manage invasive species in urban and rural forests. AFF believes it is vitally important to conduct research aimed at improving detection and control methods for the Emerald Ash

Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Sudden Oak Death, Thousand Cankers Disease, Gold-spotted Oak Borer and other non-native forests pests and diseases.

The R&D function is not only essential for providing forest management research, it is also on the leading edge of providing new information about the use of wood products, which can help create new markets for products from family-owned woodlands. This information helps position wood in growing markets, like green building markets, where understanding the environmental impacts of building materials is key. We urge the Subcommittee to call on R&D to invest an additional \$3 million in green building research through the Forest Products Laboratory to continue this important work.

Support a solution to the wildfire funding problem

Over the last decade, wildfire expenses have significantly increased, and the federal wildfire budgets often are not sufficient to cover the costs, leading the federal agencies to transfer funds from non-fire accounts to cover fire fighting expenses. In FY12, the USFS transferred \$440 million and in FY13 the transfer cost was upped to \$600 million. Understandably, this has caused significant disruptions in forest programs, including programs like the Forest Stewardship and Forest Health Protection Programs that aide family woodland owners in their stewardship.

These disruptions clearly demonstrate the urgent need to change the federal suppression funding model. This pattern of funding is neither efficient nor sustainable. The Wildfire Disaster Funding bill (S.1875 and H.R.3992) would provide the USFS and Department of the Interior with a funding structure similar to that used by other agencies that respond to natural disaster emergencies, which have budget cap exemptions for a portion of disaster funding. This important change would enable agencies to reinvest in core activities which have been reduced in recent years due to a continued shift of limited resources to fund wildfire suppression, including the very programs that would help to decrease wildfire costs over time. We urge the Subcommittee to support the Wildfire Disaster Funding bill solution.

To conclude, AFF recognizes the Subcommittee must find areas to reduce spending. We ask the Subcommittee to consider the impact these reductions will have on the country's nearly 22 million family forest owners and every American who benefits daily from the positive externalities of well-managed, working forests.

I thank the Subcommittee for the opportunity to provide some insight on these programs and appreciate consideration of my testimony.