

**Written Testimony of Scott Steen, President and CEO, American Forests
To the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
April 10, 2014**

Dear Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member Moran, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

American Forests appreciates the opportunity to submit public testimony regarding our Fiscal Year 2015 appropriation recommendations. We understand the continuing economic realities facing the nation, and we thank this Subcommittee for its support of key federal conservation programs in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2014. The return on investing in our nation's forests is great, whether those forests are public or private, urban or rural. The economic, social, and environmental benefits healthy forests provide are clear incentives for federal investment. American Forests' funding recommendations are generally consistent with the President's budget requests for the USDA Forest Service (USFS), Department of Interior (DOI), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), with the exception of programs that merit a return to the FY 2012 enacted levels.

Founded in 1875, American Forests is the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the country with the mission to protect and restore forests. It has served as a catalyst for many of the most important milestones in the conservation movement, including the founding of the USDA Forest Service, the Conservation Corps, the National Park System, and thousands of forest ecosystem restoration projects and public education efforts. Since 1990, American Forests has planted more than 46 million trees in all 50 states of U.S. and 44 countries, resulting in cleaner air and drinking water, restored habitat for wildlife and fish, and the removal of millions of tons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The economic benefits of outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation highlight the importance of American Forests' efforts. A recently published report found that the combined value of outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation annually generates at least \$1.7 trillion in economic activity, supports 12.8 million jobs, and brings in \$211 billion in tax revenue.¹ As the report notes, "this sector of the U.S. economy is larger than the U.S. auto and pharmaceutical industries combined." Protecting and restoring our forests will ensure on-going economic and environmental viability for our communities.

USDA Forest Service

National Forest System

Integrated Resource Restoration: The Administration's proposal for an Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) budget consolidation represents the USFS's approach to accelerated restoration. American Forests believes that the Administration's proposals for FY 2015 will help move the agency in the right direction by encouraging collaborative efforts with communities and partners to identify and address priorities at a landscape or watershed scale. *American Forests supports the President's request of \$820 million to aid in the restoration of our nation's forests.*

¹ Southwick Associates, "The Combined Value of Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resource Conservation, and Historical Preservation, 2013," April 8, 2013.

Restoration Partnerships: For more than two decades, American Forests has worked with the Forest Service restoring our national forests after a wildfire or other natural events. We have planted millions of trees in our national forests and appreciate the working relationship we have with USFS, which helps us provide these services. Currently, this line item is absorbed into the IRR budget reorganization. However, if this committee does not support that budget consolidation, we want to emphasize the importance of these efforts. *American Forests supports the FY 2015 level of \$2 million in support of partnerships that restore our National Forests.*

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP): This program was created to promote job stability, reliable wood supply, forest health, and reduce emergency wildfire costs and risks. In the first four years of the program, projects funded through CFLRP have: reduced hazardous fuels on 588,000 acres to protect communities, generated 814 million board feet of timber, made nearly 2 million green tons of biomass available for bioenergy production, and enhanced habitat on 474 miles of streams. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request of \$60 million; predicated on the expansion of the program through the necessary legislative action.*

Forest and Rangeland Research

The Forest and Rangeland Research appropriations provides funds to develop and deliver knowledge and innovative technology to improve the health and use of the nation's forests in both public and private lands. In the last 20 years, the number of USFS research scientists has declined from more than 2,000 to under 500 scientists today. This significantly reduces the Forest Service's ability to provide the answers it needs to sustainably manage the National Forests, as well as deliver technical assistance to private forest owners and urban forest managers. *American Forests requests the FY 2012-enacted level of \$295.3 million for the entirety of Forest and Rangeland Research.*

State and Private Forestry

Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF): Urban forests make a significant contribution to the quality of life in communities across the country. In 2013, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to 7,292 communities and nearly 198 million people, more than 60 percent of the U.S. population. Urban forests are integral to any community striving to reinvest in itself, encourage active, healthy citizens, and create a healthier and more sustainable environment with smart green infrastructure. *American Forests requests the FY 2012-enacted levels for the Urban and Community Forestry program at \$31.37 million.*

Forest Health Management: Exotic pests and invasive species are among the greatest threats to urban and rural forests. Non-native pests already cost city governments \$2 billion each year to remove and replace trees killed by pests. The substantial loss of trees in our communities impacts quality of life and property values. Funding for the Forest Health Program supports activities related to prevention, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants, as well as conducting forest health monitoring. *American Forests supports the President's combined FY 2015 request for the Forest Health Management Program on federal and cooperative lands at \$104.57 million.*

Department of Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Public Domain Forest Management: The BLM is entrusted with the management and ecosystem health and recovery of 58 million acres of forests and woodlands across 12 western states, including Alaska. According to the Department of the Interior's 2012 Economic Impact Report, timber harvested from Public Domain forests supported \$659 million in economic activity, and biomass from BLM forests has become part of the feedstock that meets various State and Federal renewable energy portfolio standards. However, 14 million acres — or 24 percent — of BLM forests are overstocked at increased risk of insect and disease attacks and catastrophic wildfire. Increased funding to address these serious risks is necessary across all land management agencies. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request at \$9.93 million.*

Fish and Wildlife Service

Endangered Species Program: For 40 years, the Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of our nation's treasured wildlife and plant species, many of which thrive in forested habitat. While the Act has made significant strides in protecting our most imperiled species, there are still major shortfalls. Numerous species in need of protection, including the whitebark pine, are precluded from the list because of the lack of adequate resources. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request of \$170.51 million.*

National Wildlife Refuge System: The Refuge System, with 561 refuges of more than 150 million acres across the country, is vital to protecting America's wildlife and ensuring that these habitats are a priority. Because refuges are visited by approximately 45 million people each year and generate more than \$4.2 billion in economic output and more than 34,000 jobs in recreation spending,² investment in the Refuge system is an investment in our communities. While it is well documented that an annual operations and maintenance budget should total at least \$900 million,³ *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request for \$476.40 million.*

National Park Service

National Park System: American Forests was instrumental nearly 100 years ago in the creation of our national parks and continues to this day supporting the service that stewards these iconic landscapes. However, many of these forested parks are threatened by a series of stresses. Invasive species and uncontrolled outbreaks of pests have left these forested treasures vulnerable. American Forests is dedicated to aiding in the restoration of these parks, especially those in the intermountain west affected by the mountain pine bark beetle. *As such, American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 total budget request of \$2.28 billion.*

Urban Parks Recreation and Recovery: The reestablishment of this program, proposed to be funded through the Land and Water Conservation Fund, is essential to bring nature to urban communities. These competitive grants focus on engaging and connecting communities, especially young people, to their neighborhood parks through projects that would revitalize and rehabilitate park and recreation opportunities. As a leader in the urban forestry field, American Forests applauds the renewed efforts of NPS and the Department of Interior to improve park units that will impact urban economies and the quality of life for urban residents by creating open green space. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request of \$25 million.*

² The Department of the Interior's Economic Contributions FY2011 report, p.21; 2006 Banking on Nature report

³ *Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2011: Assets for All Americans*, Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement

Environmental Protection Agency

Urban and rural forests offer fiscally-sound green solutions to the management of stormwater, water storage, groundwater recharge, and pollutant reduction.

Green Infrastructure and Clean Water: American Forests supports the EPA's goal of strengthening green infrastructure activities to further sustainability goals, particularly in urban, underserved and economically distressed communities by incorporating green infrastructure and enhancing stormwater management. American Forests also strongly supports efforts to expand the use of green infrastructure to meet Clean Water Act goals, however we would like to see the targeting of 20 percent of the Clean Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF) increased to include a variety of green infrastructure projects. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request of \$5 million to strengthen green infrastructure activities, and the FY 2014 enacted level of \$1.449 billion for CWSRF.*

Urban Waters Federal Partnership: This 13 interagency effort, coordinated by the EPA, helps stimulate local economies, create jobs, improve quality of life, and protect health by revitalizing urban waterways, the urban forests that protect them and the communities around them, focusing on underserved urban communities of all sizes. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2015 request of \$3.49 billion for supporting EPA's goal of protecting America's Waters, where this program sits within the EPA.*

Legislative Language Request

Wildfire Suppression Funding

Funding wildfire suppression has been an ongoing struggle for the Forest Service and the Department of Interior. As the wildfires become more frequent and more severe, which they are projected to become, a new solution to how the Agencies fund suppression needs to occur. American Forests respectfully requests the Committee address the wildfire suppression funding issue by including language from the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFDA- H.R. 3992; S. 1875) in the FY 2015 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This language provides the structure to fund a portion of the USFS and DOI wildfire suppression costs through a budget cap adjustment under the Balanced Budget and Emergency Deficit Control Act of 1985, as amended. This would provide the USFS and DOI with a funding structure similar to that used by other agencies who respond to natural disaster emergencies.

Land and Water Conservation Fund

American Forests supports the permanent authorization of full and dedicated funding, without further appropriation or fiscal year limitation for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF programs protect natural resource lands, outdoor recreation opportunities and working forests at the local, state and federal levels, ensuring these important lands are protected for current and future generations. *American Forests supports the FY15 budget request which calls for permanent authorization of \$900 million in mandatory funding for LWCF programs in the Departments of Interior and Agriculture beginning in 2016. During the transition to permanent funding in 2015, the budget proposes \$350 million in discretionary and \$550 million in permanent funding, shared by the Departments of Interior and Agriculture. This includes level discretionary funding for State Assistance grants at \$48.1 million, which includes \$3 million for "Competitive Grants."*