Fiscal Year 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
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House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
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The Society of American Foresters (SAF), with 12,000 professionals representing all disciplines within the forestry profession, promotes science-based, sustainable management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests. SAF appreciates this opportunity to submit public witness testimony on Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 appropriations because sufficient funding for the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of Interior (DOI) is vital to conserving and improving the health and productivity of our nation's forests.

The American public relies on the 751 million acres of public and private forests in the United States to provide clean and abundant air and water, recreational opportunities, forest products, fish and wildlife habitat, forage and range resources, energy, and scenic beauty. As our reliance continues to grow, pressures on forests from wildfires, drought, insects, disease, and invasive species have also risen to unprecedented levels in many areas of the country. Public agencies must manage these mounting threats while still providing for multiple uses and important ecosystem services. Maintaining this balance demands that land managers work together and with partners to identify innovative ways to maximize return when considering investments to improve the health of America's forests.

SAF's top priorities in the FY 2016 budget process impact a range of programs within USFS and DOI. Recognizing fiscal constraints, these requests will assist forest managers in sustaining our nation's forests and providing a multitude of benefits for generations to come.

SAF Top Priorities:

1. Adopt a long-term solution to wildfire suppression funding that ends fire borrowing and allows the agencies to target resources to improve forest health and resiliency, like the bi-partisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act.

2. Increase funding levels for USFS Research and Development (R&D) to no less than $226 million and no less than $83 million for the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program (FIA).

3. Fund the Forest Health Management Program (FHP) within the USFS State and Private Forestry budget line item at no less than $111 million.

4. Continue support for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) at no less than $40 million.

5. Support Bureau of Land Management Public Domain Forestry and Oregon & California Railroad Grant Lands funding levels at no less than $9.98 million and $114.5 million, respectively.

SAF is the premier national scientific and educational organization representing forestry and related natural resources professionals in the United States. Founded in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot, SAF is the largest professional society for foresters in the world. Our members include natural resource professionals in public and private settings, researchers, CEOs, administrators, educators, and students. Just as forests are fundamental to our nation, so too are the professionals who study, manage, and protect these precious resources to sustain their environmental, economic, and social benefits in perpetuity. SAF is eager to work with Congress, federal agencies, and partners to identify reasonable solutions to facilitate increasing the pace of management on federal lands, in addition to finding new ways to work with private landowners to reduce the barriers they face, keep forests as forests, and incentivize active management.

SAF is pleased that the Administration continues to show a commitment to increasing the pace and scale of management of federal lands and for increasing the USFS harvest target to 3.2 billion board feet for FY 2016. However, with up to 82 million acres in the National Forest System (NFS) in need of restoration, SAF urges this subcommittee to encourage the agency to use all available tools to implement more projects on federal lands. New authorizations in the 2014 Farm Bill have the potential to facilitate quicker responses to areas devastated by insects and disease, expand the use of Stewardship Contracting where appropriate, and take advantage of Good Neighbor Authority and other mechanisms that work across boundaries to achieve shared objectives. While adopting and embracing these new authorities, the agency must not lose sight of other available tools. USFS can work with rural communities, partners, and industry through collaboratives and other partnerships to meet management goals outlined in forest plans and possibly exceed expectations set in forest plans using forest health exemptions, designation by description, and streamlined objections among other options.

SAF Budget Recommendations

While wildfires predominantly threaten western landscapes and communities, the financial impacts weigh heavily on our whole nation. All agencies and programs funded through the Interior Appropriations Bill are at risk as wildfire suppression costs continue to rise under the current funding model. Relying on transfers from vital forest management programs and after-the-fact supplementals and repayments is neither fiscally responsible nor sustainable. Agencies and first responders need a predictable, stable, and efficient budget structure. Without swift action toward a long-term solution, USFS and DOI resources will be subsumed by wildfire and they will be unable to successfully achieve land management objectives that are fundamental to the future of our forests. ***SAF appreciates the subcommittee's support for the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (H.R. 167 & S. 235) and respectfully asks it to include similar language in the FY 2016 House Appropriations Bill.***

A comprehensive approach to averting wildfire threats and improving forest resilience is imperative. The Hazardous Fuels and Fire Risk Management line items in the USFS and DOI budgets are integral to restoring forest health and reducing the costs of wildfire suppression. Through restoring and maintaining fire-resilient landscapes and communities, these programs support the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. SAF appreciates this subcommittee's consistent support for wildfire management and encourages it to

allocate funds to address wildfire risks inside and outside the wildland urban interface. While fuels treatments in and around communities and infrastructure are important for the protection of life and property, recent research suggests that backcountry treatments are equally important to prevent large and destructive wildfires[1]. In addition to preventing and mitigating wildfire risks, these programs also serve as an important source of jobs, especially in rural communities, and expand markets for the use of biomass residuals as renewable energy through efforts like the USFS Woody Innovations Grant Program. *SAF supports funding the Hazardous Fuels line item in the USFS budget at $360 million with additional funds available in the National Forest System budget to support the landscape-scale approach and treat outside the Wildland Urban Interface and funding for the DOI Fire Risk Management Program at $178 million.*

Investments in forestry research are essential for the future health and sustainability of the nation's forests. USFS R&D functions as an incubator for new products and ideas, conducts essential research on disturbances, forest ecosystems, contributions of forests to air and water quality, species and forest resilience, treatment methods for controlling forest insects, diseases, and invasive species, renewable energy development and woody biomass conversion technology. Research conducted at the Forest Products Lab and in the research stations across the country is undeniably important. From research on control mechanism for emerald ash borer to nanotechnology, the USFS provides research that would otherwise be unfulfilled. This research and associated tech transfer provides the foundational basis for the adoption of new techniques or the achievement of scale by private entities willing to invest resources and accept the associated risks to facilitate commercial applications of the technology. Advancing forest science is integral to inform and improve the forestry profession. SAF is concerned that 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. Further reductions in the USFS R&D budget will create significant gaps in the knowledge base necessary to address the many threats facing our nation's forest and competitive losses in the global economy. *SAF supports a funding level of $226 million for USFS R&D with particular emphasis on prioritizing research efforts and transferring knowledge to forestry professionals.*

SAF strongly supports the funding increase suggested for the USFS R&D Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program and encourages this subcommittee to also provide a significant boost in funding for the program. FIA 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 provides the scientific basis

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[1] "The Efficacy of Fuels Treatments: A Rapid Assessment of the Economic and Ecological Consequences of Alternative Hazardous Fuel Treatments", Northern Arizona University Ecological Restoration Institute, May 2013.

and data needed to evaluate forest disturbance risks, such as wildfire, insects and disease, and spread of invasive species. The critical need for current information about the condition of our forests, with greater emphasis on the role of forests in maintaining and improving air quality, underlies the need for FIA program capacity to be increased in FY 2016 and beyond. *SAF requests funding at a level of at least $83 million and urges this subcommittee to provide direction for future increases to allow the program to keep pace with ever-growing information needs.*

The numerous benefits provided by forests are threatened by damaging invasive species that are arriving and spreading at an increasing rate. At least 28 new tree-killing pests have been detected over the last decade. Already, municipal governments across the country are spending more than $3 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by non-native pests, such as emerald ash borers. Homeowners are spending an additional $1 billion to remove and replace trees and are absorbing an additional $1.5 billion in reduced property values. The USFS State and Private Forestry Forest Health Management programs (FHP) manage forest health through direct action on NFS lands and provide assistance to private landowners, other federal agencies, and state and local agencies to prevent and mitigate insect and disease outbreaks as well as the spread of invasive species*. SAF recommends a funding level of $111 million to continue monitoring and responding to forest health concerns.*

SAF remains committed to the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP). CFLRP encourages collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration on priority forest landscapes. In four years, the twenty-three projects have reduced hazardous fuels, generated timber receipts, and provided a boon to struggling rural economies. *SAF supports at least a $40 million dollar funding level for CFLRP and encourages this subcommittee to push the agency to address the challenges and build on successes identified in the 5-year report scheduled for delivery to Congress this year.*

In closing, SAF members are pleased that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund was reauthorized through 2020 in the 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Bill. SAF was also encouraged by the recognition of the important work of the BLM Public Domain Forestry program (PD) with a slight funding increase in the President's budget. However, SAF is concerned with the funding reduction for the Oregon & California Railroad Grant Lands (O&C). Though the resource-intensive management plans are scheduled to be completed in 2016, the $3.2 million dollar reduction in planning funds coupled with the $3.7 million dollar reduction in the Forest Management Program will make it difficult to implement the plan, complete the necessary monitoring, and address administrative and legal challenges that always accompany new management plans. *SAF supports the funding level of $9.98 million for the PD program and urges this subcommittee to fund the O&C program at $114.5 million.*

Thank you for your time and consideration of these important requests. SAF and its extensive network of forestry and natural resources professionals stand ready to assist with further development and implementation of these efforts.