

**Written Testimony of Scott Steen, President and CEO, American Forests  
To the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
March 18, 2015**

Dear Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and Honorable Committee Members:

American Forests appreciates the opportunity to submit public testimony regarding our Fiscal Year 2016 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 and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015. The return on investing in our nation's forests is great, whether those forests are public or private, in urban areas or in wildlands. 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, and the Environmental Protection Agency, with the exception of a few programs that merit a return to the FY 2012 enacted levels prior to the sequestration.

Founded in 1875, American Forests is the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the United States. Its mission is to restore threatened forest ecosystems and inspire people to value and protect urban and wildland forests. In the past 25 years, American Forests has planted nearly 50 million trees in approximately 1,000 high-impact forest restoration projects. These projects have restored hundreds of thousands of acres of wildlife habitat, protected vital watersheds and sequestered millions of tons of greenhouse gases. American Forests is also one of the nation's leading advocates for healthy urban tree canopy and green space, and a key funder of urban forest initiatives that have transformed communities across the country. Inspiring the next generation of forest stewards is important to American Forests and to the United States. The increased focus by all of the land management agencies on youth engagement is heartening as America seeks to encourage and inspire the next generation of conservationists.

## **Department of Agriculture**

### **USDA Forest Service**

#### **National Forest System**

***Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP):*** This program was created to promote job stability, a reliable wood supply, and forest health while reducing emergency wildfire costs and risks. In the first five years of the program, projects funded through CFLRP have: reduced hazardous fuels on more than 945,000 acres to protect communities, more than 2.5 million ccf timber volume sold, made nearly 2 million green tons of biomass available for bioenergy production, and enhanced habitat on 703 miles of streams. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request of \$60 million.*

***Integrated Resource Restoration:*** The Administration's proposal for an Integrated Resource Restoration budget consolidation represents the USFS's approach to accelerated restoration. American Forests believes that the Administration's proposals for FY 2016 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 \$822.11 million to aid in the restoration of our nation's forests.*

## **Forest and Rangeland Research**

The USFS's Forest and Rangeland Research program is essential in providing support for urban and wildland forestry research activities. These focus on understanding conditions and trends in our nation's urban and community forests and in providing tools and best management practices. Agency researchers help policymakers and practitioners to understand the environmental, economic, and social services that trees and forests provide. *American Forests requests Congress to provide funding for the Forest and Rangeland Research line item at \$303 million with \$83 million allocated to the Forest Inventory Analysis.*

## **State and Private Forestry**

**Urban and Community Forestry:** The Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program has made a significant contribution to moving communities towards greater economic, environmental, and social sustainability. In FY 2014 alone, the U&CF program delivered assistance to more than 190 million people (60 percent of the U.S. population) in 7,100 communities across the country. A key reason for the program's extensive reach is that the federal investment made through the U&CF program leverages non-federal funding – often at a match of 2:1 or more. *American Forests recommends increasing funding the Urban and Community Forestry Program to pre-sequestration levels at \$31.3 million in FY 2016.*

**Forest Health Management:** The Forest Health Management programs provide essential expertise and assistance to state and municipal agencies and private landowners in countering non-native pests. Municipal governments across the country are spending more than \$3 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by these non-native pests. Homeowners are spending an additional \$1 billion to remove and replace trees on their properties and are absorbing an additional \$1.5 billion in reduced property values. *American Forests asks that the Subcommittee appropriate a total of \$111 million for the Forest Health Management programs; of which, \$48 million is specifically designated for cooperative lands programs.*

**Landscape-Scale Restoration:** The Landscape Scale Restoration program strategically prioritizes resources by competitively allocating the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act funds. It focuses on targeting federal investments —leveraged by state funding resources— to areas of greatest need, highest value, or strongest innovation potential as stipulated in each State Forest Action Plan. *American Forests recommends funding the Landscape Scale Restoration program at \$23.5 million in FY 2016.*

**Forest Legacy Program:** Since authorized in 1990, the Forest Legacy Program has protected 2.398 million acres across the country, including 169,186 acres of water bodies and 2,733 miles of streams. It is imperative to continue protecting our nation's forests for future generations while simultaneously providing the myriad of ecosystem services to current Americans. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request of \$61 million allocated through the Land and Water Conservation Fund.*

## **Department of Interior**

### **Bureau of Land Management**

**Public Domain Forest Management:** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is entrusted with the management 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 increasing the 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 2016 request at \$9.98 million.*

***National Conservation Lands:*** The National Conservation Lands —also known as the National Landscape Conservation System— encompasses signature landscapes including some of America's finest natural and cultural treasures, many of them forested. Yet, despite their codification in law and growing popularity, the system of national monuments and national conservation areas is still undercapitalized. These areas lack sufficient staff and financial resources to adequately protect their valuable natural and cultural resources and maximize their recreational potential. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request for \$48.47 million.*

### **Fish and Wildlife Service**

***Endangered Species/ Ecological Services:*** For more than 40 years, the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has helped prevent the extinction of many of our nation's treasured wildlife and plant species, many of which thrive in forested habitat. While the ESA 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. The proposed restructuring of the Fish and Wildlife Service and how it addresses endangered species listing, planning, and conservation and restoration would help in the recovery of these species and their removal from the lists. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request of \$258.24 million for ecological services.*

***National Wildlife Refuge System:*** The National Wildlife Refuge System, with 561 refuges covering more than 150 million acres across the country, is vital to protecting America's wildlife and ensuring that their habitats are a priority. Because refuges are visited by approximately 45 million people each year, generate more than \$4.2 billion in economic output, and support more than 34,000 jobs, investment in the Refuge system is an investment in our communities. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request for \$508.20 million.*

### **National Park Service**

***National Park System:*** With the National Park System's Centennial Celebration on the horizon, we encourage this subcommittee to honor "America's best idea" with increased investments in operations, construction, and the Centennial Challenge program to \$50 million. The Challenge, in particular, will encourage organizations, foundations, businesses and other non-federal institutions to help restore our parks. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 total budget request of \$3.0 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 our 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. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 request of \$25 million.*

## **Environmental Protection Agency**

### **Office of Water**

***Clean Water State Revolving Fund:*** Green infrastructure is a cost-effective and resilient approach to stormwater infrastructure needs that also provide many other community benefits. American Forests supports the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) goal of strengthening green infrastructure activities to further sustainability goals by incorporating green infrastructure and enhancing stormwater management. American Forests also supports efforts to expand the use of green infrastructure to meet Clean Water Act goals through the Clean Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF). *American Forests supports the FY 2015 enacted level of \$1.449 billion for CWSRF and supports the President's FY 2016 request that not less than 20 percent the CWSRF funding be made available for green infrastructure or environmentally innovative projects that promote water system and community resilience.*

***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. This partnership focuses on underserved urban communities of all sizes near waterways. *American Forests supports the continued efforts of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership.*

## **Legislative Language Request**

### **Wildfire Suppression Funding**

American Forests appreciates the Committee's support of the bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act (WDFDA - H.R. 167; S. 235) and respectfully request the language be highlighted in the FY 2016 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill. This language provides the structure to fund a portion of the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and Department of the Interior (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. We additionally request that the Committee appropriate the modeled levels of suppression through the Interior bill and the wildfire budget cap adjustment to meet suppression needs in FY 2016. We appreciate this Committee's attention to this increasing and unsustainable natural resource challenge. The FY 2016 appropriations bill can provide for both necessary wildfire suppression and also fire risk reduction activities that save lives, create jobs, and reduce firefighting costs in the long run. American Forests is prepared to help and look forward to assisting Congress in developing a sustainable and long-term solution to fund emergency wildfire suppression.

### **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. This program ensures that these important lands are protected for current and future generations. *American Forests supports the President's FY 2016 budget request, which calls for permanent authorization of \$900 million in mandatory funding for LWCF programs in the Departments of Interior and Agriculture.*