

**Statement of Tom Tidwell, Chief of the USDA Forest Service
Before the House Committee on Appropriations,
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Concerning President's Fiscal Year 2018 Proposed Budget
for the USDA Forest Service
May 25, 2017**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's FY 2018 Budget request for the Forest Service. I appreciate the support this Subcommittee has shown for the Forest Service in the past and I look forward to continuing to work together to ensure that stewardship of our Nation's forests and grasslands continues to meet the desires and expectations of the American people.

The 2018 President's Budget for Forest Service is nearly \$5.2 billion, of which \$467 million is mandatory funding, and is a good investment for the American public. The funding and related work will support between 340,000 and 370,000 jobs in the economy and contribute more than \$30 billion in Gross Domestic Product. The Administration's commitment to rural communities, jobs creation, shared stewardship, and the production of goods and services from National Forest System lands is demonstrated by the funding level of Forest Products and the movement of Hazardous Fuels from the Wildland Fire Management to the National Forest System. Through the use of tools like the Good Neighbor and other Farm Bill authorities utilizing funding within permanent and trust accounts, the Forest Service will sell 3.2 billion board feet of timber while improving the resilience of more than 1.7 million acres of National Forest System lands through hazardous fuels removal.

The Budget strengthens the agency's financial accountability and increases predictability in its budget planning and execution process at both the National and Regional level. Starting in FY 2018, Forest Service firefighters will charge all base hours (the first eight hours of each day) to Preparedness and, when fighting fires, charge any hours over eight per day to Suppression. The agency is continuing to strengthen its financial accountability and credibility through the implementation of policies that reinforce timely obligation of funds, the management of prior year unobligated balances, and quarterly review of unliquidated obligations.

The President's 2018 Budget

The FY 2018 request focuses on: acquiring knowledge to better manage forests and expand markets for wood and biomass; high priority projects on State and Private Forests; active forest management, as well as building agency capacity for active management. To address these focus areas, the Budget makes key investments in the following program areas:

- Forest Inventory and Analysis (\$77 million, an increase of \$2.14 million from the FY 2017 annualized Continuing Resolution level)—to continue to implement the annualized inventory program in all 50 States (including interior Alaska), the affiliated Pacific islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
- Forest Health Management (\$90.390 million, a decrease of \$9.021 million from the FY 2017 annualized Continuing Resolution level)—to continue to treat prioritized areas to reduce the potential for new outbreaks; protect these areas from damaging insects, diseases, and invasive plants; and reduce the risks of undesired mortality from wildfire.
- Forest Stewardship (\$20.5 million, a net decrease of \$2.492 million from the FY 2017 Annualized Continuing Resolution level)—to provide assistance to private landowners seeking to manage their forest lands. Better management of private lands supports the

maintenance of nearby national forest and grasslands, and provides an economic contribution to local economies.

- Forest Products (\$359.1 million, the same as the FY 2017 Annualized Continuing Resolution level)—to sell 3.2 billion board feet of timber and continue to build internal capacity in our workforce.
- Capital Improvement and Maintenance (\$99.7 million, a decrease of \$263.8 million)—to maintain a workforce that will implement critical infrastructure maintenance projects on National Forest System lands and remain ready to implement additional improvements that could be funded through the Administration’s infrastructure initiatives.
- Hazardous Fuels (\$354.3 million, a decrease of \$20 million below the FY 2017 Annualized Continuing Resolution level)—As most hazardous fuels work takes place on NFS lands, the agency will be able to administer this program more efficiently and effectively if managed as part of the National Forest System. With the funding, fuels treatments in the wildland/urban interface will reduce the risk of catastrophic fire on 1.7 million acres.
- Preparedness (\$1.34 billion, an increase of \$259.1 million from the FY 2017 annualized Continuing Resolution level)—this increase funds all base 8 costs with Preparedness. This is not new funding, but was shifted from Suppression where a portion of base 8 costs have been charged since 2004. The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior are now using the same business rules.
- Suppression (\$1.057 billion, an increase of \$247.4 million from the FY 2017 annualized Continuing Resolution level)—this amount fully funds the 10-year average costs for fire suppression.
- The Budget for wildland fire management will fund up to 20 airtankers under exclusive use contracts. In 2018, these contracts will be funded with both Preparedness and Suppression funding.

Legislative Proposals

In connection with the FY 2018 President’s Budget, we propose several key legislative changes to improve our effectiveness in delivering programs and services:

- *Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.* The 2018 budget proposes general provision language for a one-year reauthorization of the Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (FLREA) which is currently scheduled to expire on September 30, 2018. The Forest Service receives approximately \$65 million annually in recreation fee revenue. Ninety-five percent of the recreation fees collected on a national forest stay at that national forest to be reinvested in recreation sites and services. If FLREA expires without reauthorization, the agencies will have no recreation fee authority for operations and maintenance of recreation facilities or for payment for the National Recreation Reservation System.
- *Small Tracts Act Conveyance Authority.* We propose increasing the maximum value of the land that could be conveyed, from \$150,000 to \$500,000, to better align with current land values.

- *Extension of Grazing Permits.* We propose that the terms and conditions of section 325 of Public Law 108–108 (117 Stat. 1307), which regard grazing permits issued by the Forest Service on any lands not subject to administration under section 402 of the Federal Lands Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1752), shall remain in effect for FY 2018. This would address recent amendments to section 402 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and public concerns that the amendments do not apply to grazing permits issued by the Forest Service on the national grasslands and on eastern national forests.
- *Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act.* We propose a one-year reauthorization of the Forest Service Facilities Realignment and Enhancement Act of 2005 (FSREA). FSREA would allow the Secretary to convey administrative sites that the Forest Service no longer needs, and retain the proceeds from the sales for the acquisition, improvement, maintenance, reconstruction, or construction of facilities. Reauthorization would allow for better utilization of existing resources, increase the agency’s ability to address health and safety issues, and enhanced service to the public.
- *Communications Site Program.* The Forest Service seeks authority to retain \$4.5 million annually to better manage the growing use of Forest Service lands for communications facilities. This will result in an increased annual return on investment to the Treasury within two years. This proposal will result in reduced processing time for new applications to provide better customer service (currently it takes one to three years to process a new application); enhanced and expanded telecommunications provided to rural communities via broadband, personal communications systems, and emergency services; and increased safety of visitors, agency staff, and first responders through additional communications capacity.

Our budget request focuses on sustaining jobs (especially in rural America), increasing economic contribution, sharing responsibility for the stewardship of our natural resources, and more effective and efficient delivery of products and services. Our requested budget will enable us to continue to make progress addressing the growing extent and magnitude of our management challenges on National Forest System lands. Through strategic partnerships, we can accomplish more work while also yielding more benefits for all Americans, for the sake of all generations to come. I look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President’s goals and our key responsibilities for the long term benefit of Nation’s forests and grasslands and all Americans. I will be glad to answer questions you may have at this time.