

**Statement of Frank R. Beum
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Before

**The House Natural Resources Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
On**

**H.R. 401, Lowell Observatory Conveyance Act and
H.R. 1572, Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research,
Restoration, and Promotion Act**

July 18 2019, 10:00 a.m.

Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on two bills that would affect the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service).

H.R. 401, Lowell Observatory Conveyance Act

H.R. 401 would direct the Secretary of Agriculture to convey, without consideration and by quitclaim deed, all right, title, and interest of the United States in land owned and occupied by the Lowell Observatory near Flagstaff, Arizona. Specifically, this land is owned by a Trust established by Percival Lowell and his heirs. However, the Forest Service retained a timber reservation and reversionary interest when the land was originally conveyed in 1910. The Forest Service has many legal authorities to convey lands. However, none appears appropriate to process the Observatory's request to remove the timber-reservation and convey the United States' reversionary interest. If this bill were enacted, it would provide the authority needed to complete the conveyance to the Observatory.

Conclusion

The Forest Service has no concerns with and does not oppose H.R. 401.

H.R. 1572, Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration, and Promotion Act

Title I – Promoting Botanical Research and Botanical Sciences Capacity

Section 101. Department of the Interior Botanical Research. This section directs the Secretary of the Interior, through its agencies, to support a robust program of intramural and extramural botanical science research as relevant and appropriate to support its land management responsibilities. USDA defers to the Department of Interior (DOI) on this proposal.

We would like to note that USDA already has robust botanical science research programs conducted by several agencies that can assist DOI in its efforts to conduct botanical research for land management activities. Research programs within USDA such as the Forest Service Research and Development Western Center for Native Plant Conservation and Restoration Science, as well as programs within the Agricultural Resource Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service National Institute of Food and Agriculture and numerous other institutions exist.

Title I

Section 102. Staff Enhancement. The Forest Service notes that providing strong incentives to the Department of the Interior for staff enhancement may introduce unintended consequences for other federal agencies to recruit and retain botanical expertise and have broad impacts on the federal government's capacity in this field.

Title II – Generating Demand for Native Plant Materials

Section 201. Policy for Use of Locally Adapted Native Plant Materials. This section establishes new policy to be used by both USDA and DOI that would require locally adapted native plant materials to be used to the extent practicable. The Forest Service already has a robust native plant materials policy that meets and exceeds the requirements of this section.¹ This policy has been in effect and successfully implemented by the Forest Service for eleven years.

The intent of this section duplicates current agency policy. We would be happy to work with the bill sponsors and the Subcommittee to provide additional information on our extensive work in this area and our technical concerns with this section.

Title II

Section 201(c). Dissemination of Recommendations for Other Federal Agencies with Substantial Land Use Responsibilities. This section directs the Forest Service to develop recommended activities for the Department of Defense, Department of Transportation and the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service (GSA).

The Forest Service has many efforts already in place that provide opportunities to collaborate with the Department of Defense, Department of Transportation and the GSA.² Examples include the Department of Defense Round Table hosted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. Department of Transportation agreements for roadside revegetation in the Western and Northern Regions, and support to the Council on Environmental Quality and the General Services Administration on using pollinator friendly native plant species around federal buildings.

The intent of this section duplicates and could affect current agency activities. We would be happy to work with the bill sponsors and the Subcommittee to provide additional information on our extensive work in this area and our technical concerns with this section.

Title III – Authorization of Federal Native Plant Materials Related Activities

Section 301. Interagency Plant Materials Efforts. This section directs a selected group of agencies to collaborate regarding the use of native plant materials. The Forest Service currently has the authorities to accomplish the kind of collaborative work outlined in this section.

¹ See Addendum 1, Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2070

² See Addendum 2, Region One Native Plant Program: Partnering with Western Federal Highways 2015 Accomplishments

Examples of how the Forest Service is implementing interagency collaboration are:

1. **Identify Seed needs and ensure the reliable availability of genetically appropriate seed.** The Forest Service Nursery System is playing a key role in producing source identified native plant materials for multiple federal agencies including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), FWS, National Park Service (NPS), Bureau of Reclamation, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Federal Highways Administration (FHA), as well as numerous State, county, city and tribal governments. Other collaborative efforts include the Forest Service Rocky Mountain Research Station work with the Bureau of Land Management Great Basin Restoration Initiative through the Great Basin Native Plant Selection and Increase Project. This multi-state, collaborative initiative has been successful in developing new locally adapted native plant materials, and in conducting research on the application of seed for successful restoration efforts. More than 20 federal, state, and private cooperators work together to improve the availability of native plant materials and to provide the knowledge and technology required for their use in restoring diverse native plant communities across the Great Basin. The Forest Service participates in similar landscape programs in the Colorado Plateau, the Southwest and in Oregon. In addition, the Forest Service is working with Federal, State, and other partners to sustainably manage crop wild relative native plant material needs.³
2. **Conduct research to develop genetically appropriate seed and to improve technology for seed production and ecological restoration.** The Forest Service is the lead federal agency in developing seed transfer zones and guidelines for ecological restoration. In 2005, the Forest Service and ARS undertook a 9-year project to build empirical seed zones for bluebunch wheatgrass. The research helps the Forest Service and BLM accelerate restoration of native grasses and combat invasive species such as cheatgrass. The Forest Service National Genetics Laboratory produces critical information on rare plant species which is utilized by multiple agencies in the management of Threatened and Endangered plants.
3. **Support land manager's ability to make timely and informed seeding decisions for ecological restoration.** The Forest Service partners with other agencies to identify appropriate seed mixes and species lists to use across jurisdictional boundaries. A guidebook for roadside revegetation was produced through a collaboration with FHA in the Interior West. The Forest Service's National Seed Lab and network of Forest Service Seed Extractories test the viability of seeds and develops propagation protocols to assist land managers with restoration objectives.
4. **Efforts to enhance, protect, and restore plant materials necessary to support pollinators and dispersers.** The Forest Service developed a list of over 400 native plant species that provide nectar and habitat for native pollinators and works locally to prioritize pollinator species for restoration efforts. The Forest Service's Bend, Oregon Seed Extractory is currently processing 12 species of milkweeds from 12 different states for Monarch habitat restoration for the Forest Service, BLM, FWS and other agencies and tribes.
5. **Efforts to coordinate activities aimed at sustaining and restoring public lands through techniques and materials that promote, to the extent practicable, the use of**

³ See Addendum 3, Joint Strategic Framework on the Conservation and Use of Native Crop Wild Relatives in the United States

locally adapted native plant materials. The collaborative efforts of Forest Service Research, National Forest System botanists, and the national network of Forest Service nurseries and seed extractories enable the Forest Service to support Shared Stewardship restoration efforts. In addition, we are building relationships with rural native seed producers which also support local economies. For example, in the Pacific Northwest Region, the Forest Service works hand-in-hand with local seed growers such as BFI Native Seeds, LLC in Moses Lake, Washington to increase production of locally adapted (genetically appropriate) source identified native seeds for restoration and post fire management activities. From 2014 to 2017, local producers have increased production of 70 species for project work including many priority forbs for pollinators.

The intent of this section duplicates and could affect current agency activities. We would be happy to work with the bill sponsors and the Subcommittee to provide additional information on our extensive work in this area and our technical concerns with this section.

Title III

Section 302(b) (7). Bureau of Land Management Plant Conservation Program, Coordinating a national network of seed storage warehouse.

Several USDA agencies currently maintain seed storage facilities across the country, including the Forest Service and ARS. The intent of this section duplicates and could affect current agency activities. We would be happy to work with the bill sponsors and the Subcommittee to provide additional information on our extensive work in this area and our technical concerns with this section.

Conclusion

The Department appreciates the opportunity to highlight the Forest Service efforts currently underway that support these goals. We would be interested in working with the sponsors and the Subcommittee to address the specific concerns regarding the policy for use of locally adapted native plant materials noted in our testimony and other technical corrections.

That concludes my testimony. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee members may have for me.