

Statement of Randy Moore, Chief of the USDA Forest Service

**Before the
The House Committee on Agriculture
Subcommittee on Conservation and Forestry**

**Concerning
A 2022 Review of the Farm Bill: Forestry**

July 13, 2022

Chair Spanberger, Ranking Member LaMalfa, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to address the Subcommittee regarding the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service's implementation of the 2018 Farm Bill forestry programs.

Over the past five decades, the Forest Service has received authorization for numerous valuable programs through the Farm Bill that support our mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. These authorizations have supported both our efforts on our Federal lands, as well as ways to sustain and support the health and conservation of our nation's state and private forestlands. Throughout the 2018 Farm Bill, principally in the Forestry Title, there are many authorities and provisions that assist the Forest Service in accomplishing our priority work, particularly ecological restoration, support to communities, vital voluntary conservation efforts, and reducing hazardous fuels. Together, these provisions demonstrate our commitment to shared stewardship of national forests and grasslands, while strengthening relationships with States, Tribes, and local communities.

The Forest Service is using the 2018 Farm Bill authorities to help advance the agency's 10-year wildfire crisis strategy. Along with the tools and investments Congress enacted in the 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA), USDA is using Farm Bill authorities to combat the growing wildfire risk, create new markets and technology for wood products, and working to restore forests through partnerships and collaboration across landscapes. Today, I will focus on the implementation of the Farm Bill authorities and highlight the accomplishments achieved through use of the reauthorized Insect and Disease Categorical Exclusion (Section 603 of the Healthy Forests Restoration Act), the expanded Good Neighbor Authority, the new Tribal forestry demonstration project, the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, and the Wood Innovation grant programs.

The 2014 Farm Bill's Insect and Disease provisions set requirements for designating affected National Forest System areas, enabling streamlined environmental review procedures to expedite projects that reduce the risk and extent of, or increase the resilience to, insect or disease infestations. As of June 2022, approximately 77.5 million acres across National Forest System lands have been designated as already experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, insect and disease infestations. The 2014 Farm Bill also created a statutory Categorical Exclusion for certain insect and disease projects that met certain stringent criteria. The 2018 Farm Bill extended this

Categorical Exclusion authority and allowed projects that reduce hazardous fuels to be carried out in the designated treatment areas (Section 8407). As of May 2022, the Forest Service has signed decisions for or is in the process of analyzing 274 projects encompassing 538,129 acres in 31 states using the Insect and Disease Categorical Exclusion.

The Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), first authorized in the 2014 Farm Bill, allows the Forest Service to work with States, Tribes, and counties to perform treatments across larger landscapes through partnerships. In 2014, this authority allowed the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with States and Puerto Rico to perform authorized watershed restoration and forest management services by our partners on Federal lands. The 2018 Farm Bill expanded this valuable authority to Tribes and counties and allows States to maintain revenues generated from the sale of National Forest System timber for future GNA activities (Section 8624). To date, the Forest Service has completed 339 GNA agreements to accomplish a variety of restoration work: 38 State agreements, nine Tribal agreements, and seven agreements with counties. This authority is extremely beneficial because it improves the Agency's access to State, Tribal and county expertise to accomplish restoration and hazardous fuels reduction work across larger landscapes. This authority also supports working with and learning from our partners so we can apply collective knowledge broadly on public lands.

USDA is responsible for managing millions of acres of Federal lands and waters that contain cultural and natural resources of significance and value to Tribes, including sacred religious sites, burial sites, wildlife resources, and sources of Indigenous foods and medicines. The 2018 Farm Bill authorized a new Tribal forestry demonstration project to allow tribes to propose projects on national forest lands to drive forest restoration and protect Tribal resources from threats such as fire, insects, and disease. As of the second quarter of Fiscal Year 2022, agreements have been executed with Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Pueblo of Acoma, Pueblo of Jemez, and The Tulalip Tribes.

The 2018 Farm Bill reauthorized and increased the authorization for appropriations for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) (Section 8629). Through the CFLRP, we are able to accomplish critical collaborative, science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes. These projects produce significant outcomes on the landscape, including reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, eradicating invasive plants, restoring stream habitat, and accomplishing vital forest vegetation work through planting, seeding, and natural regeneration. Since the beginning of the program through Fiscal Year 2021, the Forest Service has funded 24 CFLRP landscapes nationwide. These projects have advanced treatment on over 4.5 million acres to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire, established 224,000 acres of forest vegetation, and enhanced over 1,700 miles of stream habitat. In addition, CFLRP also has significant economic benefits, supporting over \$2.3 billion in total local labor income. In April 2022, USDA announced an additional \$31.1 million in funding for 15 CFLRP projects, including six new projects.

The 2018 Farm Bill codified the existing Wood Innovation Grant Program and established a new program, the Community Wood Grant Program. These grant programs support Forest Service efforts to build innovative markets for wood products and wood energy that support rural

economies with more jobs and income. The Wood Innovations and Community Wood Programs help support more and better markets and capacity for sustainable forest management and hazardous fuels reduction. The Wood Innovation Grant Program (Section 8643) allows the Forest Service to award grants to individuals, public or private entities, or State, local or Tribal governments for the purpose of advancing the use of innovative wood products. The program stimulates and expands sustainable wood products and wood energy markets, with a focus on mass timber, tall wood buildings, renewable wood energy, and technological development that supports fuel reduction and sustainable forest management. The Community Wood Grant Program (Section 8644) supports facility expansion or new equipment for thermal wood energy (wood-to-heat) projects and innovative wood products manufacturing. In Fiscal Year 2022, the Forest Service awarded over \$32 million in grants for 99 projects using these two authorities.

Our 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy aims to increase science-based fuels treatments by up to four times previous treatment levels, especially in those areas most at risk. Fuels treatments by the Forest Service, together with partners, have made a difference over the years. However, the scale of treatments is outmatched by the rapid increase in the scale and severity of wildfires as climate change accelerates. This Strategy calls for treating up to 20 million additional acres of National Forest System lands over the coming decade, and working with partners, including colleagues at the U.S. Department of the Interior, to treat up to 30 million additional acres on adjoining lands of multiple ownerships, while building a long-term maintenance plan. The intent for these treatments is to reduce the trajectory of wildfire risk to communities, municipal water sources, and natural resources, and to restore fire-adapted landscapes so they are more resilient.

USDA is thankful that Congress has provided extensive tools, programs, and funding for partnerships and landscape scale work to carry out the science-based strategy. Many of these authorities have come through the Farm Bill, including GNA agreements, CFLRP, and stewardship contracts. Examples of initial projects under the strategy include:

- **Central Washington Initiative.** The Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in Washington will use, among other authorities, a GNA agreement with the Washington Department of Natural Resources and stewardship agreements for timber, fuels, and aquatics projects. The project is intended to reduce the risk of wildfire and restore cross-boundary landscapes on 2.45 million acres over 10 years (1.35 million acres of National Forest System lands; 1.1 million acres on other land ownerships).
- **Colorado Front Range.** Due to years of fire suppression, Colorado's Front Range forests are unhealthy and lend themselves to intense wildfires. These forests are key sources of water for the Front Range, making it critical to reduce the likelihood, intensity, and size of fires to reduce the level of sedimentation in reservoirs. The Arapaho and Roosevelt National Forests and Pike-San Isabel National Forests are utilizing GNAs (among other tools) to carry out an integrated approach to conducting strategic fuels treatments on over 36,000 acres over the next three fiscal years to reduce fire risk and effect for people and businesses in the area.
- **Central Oregon.** Central Oregon is experiencing the most extensive community growth in the State with some communities increasing almost 30 percent in the past 10 years. Hundreds of thousands of acres of Federal land are immediately adjacent to communities and subdivisions, and treatment of these areas is critical to reduce wildfire risks. The

Deschutes National Forest is working with several partners to restore forested landscapes while reducing wildfire risk to life, property and economic interests in and adjacent to the communities of Bend, Sunriver, LaPine and Crescent. The Forest Service is using authorities under GNA, CFLRP and others to carry out an expected 50,000 acres of treatments over the next three fiscal years.

- **Kootenai Complex.** The Kootenai National Forest in Montana is working with several partners to treat hazardous fuels across 150,000 acres within high-risk fireheds surrounding the communities of Libby, Troy, Eureka, Stryker, Fortine and Trego. These communities are at a particularly high risk of being impacted by severe wildfire events. The Kootenai National Forest has a GNA agreement with the State to increase the pace and scale of treatments across the forest using funds from the IJA in order to mitigate wildfire risk and reduce community exposure.

The wood products industry is an important partner for helping achieve restoration outcomes and reduce wildfire risk under this Strategy. For example, the Kootenai Complex Project will also complement an ongoing county-wide effort to increase infrastructure capacity for wood product utilization. Throughout implementation of the Strategy, we will continue to work with our industry partners through programs like the Wood Innovation Grant Program to develop new and innovative uses of wood and develop markets for biomass and small-diameter materials.

Significant effort goes into drafting a new Farm Bill every five years. USDA looks forward to our work with the Committee to ensure the Forest Service has the tools it needs to address the wildfire crisis as well as successfully implement the full breadth of the Agency's mission. We appreciate your efforts and look forward to providing input as you frame and develop the 2023 Farm Bill.