

**Fiscal Year 2020 US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Written Testimony of Terry Baker
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February 26, 2019**

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) appreciates this subcommittee's steadfast commitment to providing the tools and support forest managers need to improve health and productivity of our nation's public and private forests. Please accept this written testimony on Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 appropriations for the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) on behalf of over 11,000 SAF members across the country.

SAF Top Federal Priorities for FY 2020

1. Increase funding for USFS Forest and Rangeland Research to no less than \$310 million, with no less than \$83 million for the Forest Inventory and Analysis program.
2. Continue to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risks through increasing the pace and scale of forest management on federal lands.
3. Maintain funding support for USFS State and Private Forestry Programs at or above the FY 2019 funding levels.
4. Support Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Public Domain Forestry and Oregon & California Railroad Grant Lands funding levels at no less than \$10 million and \$113.7 million, respectively.

Just as forests are fundamental to our nation, so too are the professionals who study, manage, and care for these precious resources. Founded by Gifford Pinchot in 1900, SAF is the premier scientific and educational organization in the United States—promoting science-based, sustainable management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests. SAF members include public and private sector natural resource professionals, researchers, CEOs, administrators, investment advisors, educators, and students.

Americans rely on the 751 million acres of public and private forests in the US to provide clean and abundant air and water, forest products, fish and wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, forage and range resources, energy, and scenic beauty.

We are keen to continue to assist Congress in collaboration with federal agencies and partners to identify reasonable solutions to increase the pace and scale of management on federal lands, find new ways to work with private landowners, work across boundaries, keep forests as forests, incentivize active management, and deliver practical innovations to meet future challenges and market demands. Healthy, viable forests are long-term investments, and mitigating fire risk is one of many reasons why management is critical to sustaining the many benefits forests provide. Commitment to consistency from Congress and the Administration in delivery of timely budget and appropriations cycles would be a

tremendous help. Breaking the pattern of unresolved funding bills and continuous resolutions would provide the certainty necessary for resource managers to plan for the upcoming field season and consider future years as well. This certainty will dictate management activities and allow managers to provide direction and instruction on deployment of resources to address critical needs.

Our forests face unprecedented threats, these appropriations requests will assist in improving the health of our forests nationwide and providing a multitude of benefits for generations to come.

Forestry Research—Investments in forestry research are essential for the future health and sustainability of the nation’s forests, which include 22 million small private forest landowners. Although this testimony focuses on USFS Forest and Rangeland Research programs, SAF also recognizes and supports the full array of forestry research efforts led by the Bureau of Land Management, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Geologic Survey, and others including land-grant institutions and other universities. USFS Research and Development (USFS R&D) research conducted at the five USFS research stations, the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, and in the Forest Products Laboratory is crucial. Federal forestry research develops new products and practical innovation; identifies forest ecosystem disturbance response and forest resilience; helps responses to shifting social demands and demographic changes; and quantifies the contributions of forests to air and water quality. Without USFS leadership, investigation of these critical research needs would largely be left unfulfilled. Using federal investments that are leveraged in partnership with universities and private-public consortiums, important research questions, emerging threats, and potential opportunities are thoroughly researched and vetted. Clear and relevant research helps eliminate uncertainties and builds consensus on management actions, potentially avoiding litigation and enabling more projects to move forward. These results are disseminated through wide networks in the forestry community, help to support decision-making, and drive innovations in practices and utilization.

If forest research capacity in the US continues to decline, forest managers will not be able to meet current and future challenges with existing science and technical information. Continuing the trend of reductions in the USFS R&D budget will result in significant gaps in knowledge, missed opportunities, the US ceding its position as the leader in forestry research and development, and poor management of resources at a time of unprecedented threats posed by wildfire, drought, insects, disease, and invasive species. ***SAF supports a funding level of \$310 million for USFS R&D, with emphasis on prioritization of research projects uniquely suited to R&D expertise furthering agency and partner objectives.***

FIA Funding—SAF strongly supports the funding increases for the USFS R&D Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program. FIA is the backbone of US forestry—providing the only national census of forests across all ownerships. Through FIA, the USFS, with state forestry agency, university, and private sector partners, 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 serve 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. 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 2020 and beyond. ***SAF requests additional investment in FIA with a funding level of at least \$83 million. We urge the subcommittee to ensure that this increase does not come at the expense of other research programs, and provide direction for future increases to allow the program to keep pace with ever-growing and diverse information needs.***

Fire Science Program—SAF has concerns with the continued erosion in support for the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP). This reduction in funding coupled with decreases in the National Fire Plan Research and Development (NFP R&D) will negatively impact the joint research program with over 200 federal agency, university, and nongovernmental partners. Eliminating JFSP and reducing funding for the NFP R&D will hinder exploration of fire research and negatively impact efforts to restore resilience to the landscape. ***SAF urges the subcommittee to fund JFSP at a \$6.9 million funding level and ensure active participation by DOI and USFS in prioritizing investment in fire research and decision support.***

Wildfire Funding and Federal Forest Management—We appreciate this subcommittee's longstanding support and tireless efforts to change the way wildfires are funded. Thank you for helping to finally treat wildfires like other natural disasters. SAF expects to work with this subcommittee in the coming year and beyond to facilitate implementation of this new approach to funding wildfires and that fire response efforts place a premium on cost reduction and realizing greater efficiency where possible and emphasize transparency and timeliness in reports and disclosures during and after fire events.

While passing a wildfire funding fix was a huge step forward, there is a lot of work to be done on the ground with estimates of more than 82 million acres in the National Forest System (NFS) still in need of restoration. SAF supports the continued commitment to increasing the pace and scale of management on federal lands with the FY 2019 USFS harvest target of 3.7 billion board feet. However, reforestation and infrastructure improvements are also important to recovery and mitigating risks, particularly with devastating losses from fire, hurricanes and tornados, and insects and disease. These forest losses impact local economies as well as quality of life for all, and in some unfortunate cases, like the recent mudslides, they impact the human welfare of those already reeling from significant losses.

SAF urges this subcommittee to encourage the agencies to use all available tools to expand collaboration with rural communities, partners, and industry to meet and exceed forest plan management goals. Existing authorizations in the Farm Bill, the 2018 Omnibus, and other sources can facilitate quicker responses to areas devastated by insects and disease, more Stewardship Contracts, Good Neighbor agreements, increased use of remote sensing where appropriate, and other mechanisms to work across boundaries on shared objectives. Additionally, support for Environmental Assessment and Decision-Making streamlining efforts should help to improve forest and community resilience. However, continued decreases in NFS Forest Products program and Capital Improvement and Maintenance could impede fulfillment

of these partnerships critical to meeting forest plan targets and local economic sustainability.

Hazardous Fuels—A comprehensive approach to forest resilience is imperative. The Hazardous Fuels and Fire Risk Management line items in the USFS and DOI budgets are integral to forest health, risk mitigation, and reducing wildfire suppression costs. Promotion of fire-resilient landscapes and communities supports the goals of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy. SAF appreciates this subcommittee’s consistent support for wildfire management and urges fund allocations to address wildfire risks inside and outside the wildland-urban interface. Hazardous Fuels programs also serve as an important source of jobs, maintain critical forest products processing capability, 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 USFS Hazardous Fuels Program at \$435 million and \$189 million for DOI.***

State and Private Forestry—SAF encourages this subcommittee to recognize the importance of USFS State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs. The Urban and Community Forestry, Landscape Scale Restoration, Forest Stewardship, and Forest Health Management programs provide important technical and financial assistance to private landowners and the resource managers responsible for managing more than 60 percent of America’s forests. Investments in these programs are leveraged to help to build healthy and thriving forest resources that benefit all citizens. Likewise, the International Forestry program creates new and diverse market opportunities for US forest products and provides expert advice to countries across the globe raising awareness about the goods and services forests can provide. ***Eliminating, consolidating, or drastically cutting funding for these programs would have profound adverse impacts on people and communities across the country—particularly in rural communities—and will jeopardize the essential benefits all citizens rely on forests to provide. SAF recommends that these programs be at least maintained at FY 2019 levels.***

Public Domain Program—Finally, SAF is encouraged by the recognition of the important work of the BLM Public Domain Forestry (PD) program. SAF asks this committee to consider amending the extension of the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund authorization in the 2015 Omnibus Bill to beyond 2020. SAF is concerned with the proposed funding reduction for the Oregon & California Railroad Grant Lands (O&C) in the President’s proposed budget. SAF also requests that this subcommittee consider a provision to expand the 3000 acres insect and disease categorical exclusions to include the Bureau of Land Management through designation of the Secretary of Interior by amending of Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. ***SAF supports \$10 million for the PD program and \$113 million for the O&C program. We also urge this subcommittee to extend authorization of Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund beyond FY 2020 and the Emergency Insect and Disease Designations through requests from Governors to the Secretary of the Interior as well as the Secretary of Agriculture through amendment of the Healthy Forest Restoration Act.***

Thank you for your 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 and ideas.