

Testimony of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition to the Subc. on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies: Re: Fiscal Year 2020 U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Federal Forest Resource Coalition, representing purchasers of Federal timber in 33 states, with over 650 member companies and affiliated associations, collectively representing over 390,000 employees.

National Forests are producing less than half the timber called for in current Forest Plans. Lack of management over the last quarter century has left National Forests fire prone and unhealthy, and has degraded wildlife habitat. Road systems and campgrounds are in disrepair; the Forest Service has an infrastructure maintenance backlog exceeding \$5.6 Billion. We urge Congress to take steps to reverse these negative trends, taking advantage of potential efficiencies while investing in critical areas to support timber outputs.

We make the following specific programmatic recommendations for Fiscal Year 2019:

- Restore funding for **Capital Improvement and Maintenance-Roads** budget to \$248 Million, an increase of about \$20 million over the FY 2019 enacted level, with a focus on roads that provide access for both recreational hunting and fishing, as well as access to forests needing management.
- Increase spending for the **National Forest timber program** to \$385 million (an increase of about \$17 million over the FY 2019 enacted level), with an explicit goal of a 4 Billion Board Foot (BBF) timber sale program in FY 2020. The sale program should be geared towards sustaining and creating local jobs and increasing the pace of forest restoration; National Forest timber must be processed domestically, so increased timber sales generate needed jobs in economically distressed rural counties.
- **Reorient the Forest Service workforce away from the Washington Office** to field units that do the work and create jobs: Since 1998, the number of Forest Service employees associated with the Washington Office has increased by over 450 percent. The Forest Service should be directed to reduce Washington Office staff substantially by 2020, while increasing field staff dedicated to land management.
- Maintain strong funding for **Wildland Hazardous Fuels Reduction**.

We commend this committee for their critical role in resolving the “fire borrowing” crisis in 2018. The 2020 budget will be the first one that includes access to emergency funding for extraordinary fire suppression costs. FFRC appreciates the strong support the subcommittee has shown for the timber and hazardous fuels programs.

Our Mills Rely on Predictable, and Growing Supplies of Timber: Our member companies make large investments in logging and mill infrastructure. Several issues at the Forest Service inhibit our member’s ability to grow and compete. Unpredictable timber supplies caused by erratic appropriations and obstructionist tactics by radical groups taking advantage of burdensome regulations make it difficult to sustain the investments needed to keep our companies competitive.

The Need for Management: As you know, the National Forest System is experiencing significant forest health challenges. The Chief has testified that the National Forests have more than 82 million acres are in need of active management, with large scale insect and drought mortality in the Rockies, the Northwest, and particularly in California. While harvest levels and acreage treatments have been increasing very slowly since the early 2000's, the current pace and scale of management is insufficient to reduce fire danger, create needed wildlife habitat, or support local economies.

Years of hands off management have created stagnant, overcrowded stands, susceptible to insect outbreaks and large fires. The mortality situation is particularly pressing in California, where unmanaged forests proved particularly susceptible to the combined forces of drought and insects. On two Southern Sierra National Forests alone, there is an estimated 10 Billion Board Feet of standing dead timber. This unforgivable failure to manage must stop, now.

Further, the Forest Service has a multi-billion capital facilities maintenance backlog, even as Congress continues to underfund Capital Improvement & Maintenance spending. After years of steep cuts, the CI&M Roads line item remains more than 34 percent below the FY 2010 level, when adjusted for inflation. We urge Congress to prioritize management of existing forests and addressing the maintenance backlog over any efforts to expand National Forests ownership.

We are critically concerned with the reductions in funding for National Forest Roads over time, and the state of disrepair evident in much of the road system. The combined impacts of fires, heavy snow pack, and spring runoff have created additional repair and reconstruction needs. We urge Congress to invest in these critical assets. These investments will create jobs in hard-pressed rural communities while improving access for management, recreation, and firefighting.

With fires and extensive mortality, our Federal forests serve as a cautionary tale that discourages use of sustainable wood products, hampering the competitiveness of our industry. Our Federal forests can be managed to achieve climate resilience, carbon sequestration, improved habitats, and good rural jobs.

Increasing the Pace and Scale of Management Through Shared Stewardship: Chief Christiansen has prioritized increased management, including timber harvest, on our National Forests. Current forest plans call for over 6 Billion Board Feet of harvest annually, enough to substantially increase in the number of acres treated for hazardous fuels, watershed protection, and wildlife habitat each year.

The current level of management is insufficient to address pressing forest health problems or meet the needs of the forest products infrastructure remaining near our National Forests. Congress should direct the Forest Service to focus on meeting forest plan ASQ's, and urge them to utilize expedited authorities to meet this goal.

The increases recommended above can easily be paid for by redirecting Forest Service land acquisition funding to these higher priority programs

We urge the Committee to direct the Forest Service to use higher-value timber sales to create receipts which can replenish Forest Roads trust funds, rather than solely relying on trading low-value material for road work in Stewardship contracts. The Forest Service should be directed to maximize the use of expanded authority to use Knutsen-Vandenberg Funds beyond the sale area, which was provided by this committee in 2005.

The Committee should direct the Forest Service to aggressively utilize streamlined authorities, (including the Healthy Forest Restoration Act, the 2018 Farm Bill, and various spending bills) to increase the number of acres treated, restore forest health, and supply timber to local economies.

We strongly urge you to continue directing the Forest Service to meet their forest products output targets using only commercial products such as sawlogs, pulpwood, and commercial biomass, not personal use firewood; and to focus higher yielding forest management projects on lands designated as suitable for timber production.

Stepping up management will address pressing forest health concerns while bolstering employment in economically distressed rural communities. Investing in the Forest Service timber program is an effective job creator, generating 16.5 new direct and indirect jobs per million board feet harvested.

BLM Forest Management: BLM Forest Management: FFRC's members are very concerned about a lack of timber harvests from BLM's Western Oregon O&C lands, which have a statutory mandate for sustained-yield timber production under the O&C Act. The O&C Lands grow an estimated 1.2 billion board feet of timber per year, and current management is leaving these lands badly overstocked and in constant threat of catastrophic fire.

We urge the Committee to provide at least \$111 million for the O&C line item in Fiscal Year 2020 as well as specific direction to the BLM to prioritize increased timber outputs on these lands. The newly issued Resource Management Plans for Western Oregon call for 278 million board feet of timber, but the BLM could exceed these levels with additional resources and focus.

The BLM O&C lands are critically important to dozens of local mills and manufacturers that rely on these lands for their log supply. The timber sale program has been reduced from nearly 240 million board feet in FY14 to a planned program of 216 million board feet in FY 2018. Unfortunately, the BLM only sold 175 million board feet in FY 2018 and awarded even less volume due to administrative protests. The Committee should provide direction to the BLM to streamline its broken protest process and report its timber outputs in volumes sold and awarded, rather than merely volume offered, making them consistent with the Forest Service, which reports its timber outputs in volumes sold.

Local counties are also facing severe budget shortfalls due to massive reductions in BLM timber receipts. The O&C Counties receive 50 percent of BLM timber receipt revenues, compared to the 25 percent shared with Forest Service counties. We urge the Committee to refocus the BLM on sustained yield timber management to meet the needs of local communities and comply with the unique statutory mandate of the O&C Act.

The focus of the Public Domain Forest Management Program is the long-term health of BLM timberlands. The program is important to local forest products companies for raw material and for enabling them to create jobs, manufacture wood products, and contribute to local economies. BLM Public Domain lands face many of the same issues with regards to insects and fires as do the national forests. The BLM also faces issues with timely and efficient project implementation. We recommend FY 2020 funding for the BLM Public Domain timber program of no less than \$10.6 million. We also recommend extending the hazardous fuels reduction authorities contained in the FY 2018 Consolidated Appropriations Act to the BLM.

Alaska: The Forest Service must be stopped from implementing the ill-conceived Tongass Forest Plan Amendment adopted in 2016. FFRC members in Alaska depend upon supplies of timber from this forest. The revised plan will not meet local industry needs for decades. The Tongass must offer a timber sale program that complies with the National Forest Management Act and can sustain the local industry.

We have appreciated language directing the Forest Service to offer viable timber sales to sustain the forest industry in SE Alaska, and urge you to include similar language in your bill. We support the Administration's efforts to revisit administrative restrictions placed on the management of the Tongass, which is largely off limits to most management. We urge the Subcommittee to make permanent the Red Cedar language which has been in Interior bills for more than a decade. This language is necessary to ensure that USFS sales are not offered as deficit sales.

Conclusion: More forest management work needs to be done on the National Forests. Doing so will help mitigate fire hazards and increase employment in hard pressed rural areas. Unfortunately, budget proposals in recent years have deemphasized land management and care for important infrastructure. This Congress has the opportunity to correct these mistakes and prioritize the management of these great American resources before it is too late. We urge you to enact a 2020 bill on a timely basis that makes land management job one for the Forest Service.

About the FFRC: FFRC is a national coalition of wood products companies, local governments, conservation groups united by concern for the National Forests. FFRC supports improving the management of the federal lands to support healthy forests and vibrant rural communities.

Federal Forest Resource Coalition
2000 Pennsylvania Ave., NW Suite 3000
Washington, DC 20006