

**Fiscal Year 2021 US House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Written Testimony of Terry Baker
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February 6, 2020**

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony to the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies regarding fiscal year (FY) 2021 appropriations. SAF recommendations focus on supporting programs at the USDA Forest Service (USFS) and the Department of the Interior (DOI), including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

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. As the professionals who study, manage, and care for our nation’s forest resources, we have a vested interest in ensuring their long-term health and sustainability. Investment in forest management activities across landscapes is essential to maintain and bolster the social, economic, and environmental benefits forests and trees provide.

On behalf of over 10,000 members across the country, we wish to thank this subcommittee for its work in supporting and securing funding increases for many USFS and DOI programs for FY 2020. These important gains would not have been realized without your leadership and commitment to forests, forest management, and forestry and natural resources professionals.

Top Federal Priorities for FY 2021

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 support increased cross-boundary work and collaboration across landownerships and stakeholders to improve forest health and reduce wildfire risks.
3. Maintain funding support for USFS State and Private Forestry Programs at or above FY 2020 funding levels.
4. Support BLM Public Domain Forestry and Oregon & California Railroad Grant Lands funding levels at no less than \$10.24 million and \$112.1 million, respectively.

Please note, because the President’s budget for FY 2021 and the accompanying agency reports have not been released yet, the following represents a placeholder until further information is available. We plan to augment this information and submit updated testimony in March.

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. ***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.***

Forest Inventory and Analysis—The USFS R&D Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program is the backbone of US forestry—providing the only national census of forests across all ownerships. Through FIA, the USFS, in partnership 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 underlies the need for FIA program capacity to be increased in FY 2021 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 appreciates this subcommittee’s commitment to continuing the important work of the Joint Fires Science Program (JFSP). ***SAF supports funding for the JFSP at or above FY 2020 levels and asks the subcommittee to encourage 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 again for helping to finally treat wildfires like other natural disasters. 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 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.

Hazardous Fuels—Thank you for the significant increase to hazardous fuels funding for FY 2020. These programs at USFS and DOI are integral to forest health, risk mitigation, and reducing wildfire suppression costs. They 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 and DOI Hazardous Fuels Program at or above FY 2020 levels.***

State and Private Forestry—SAF again thank this subcommittee for its recognition of the importance of USFS State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs. ***SAF recommends that these programs be at least maintained at FY 2020 levels.***

Bureau of Land Management—Management of BLM forestlands is an important element of maintaining and improving the health and productivity of our nation’s public lands. SAF asks this subcommittee to extend authorization for the Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund. The authorization in the 2015 Omnibus Bill is currently set to expire in 2020. SAF also requests that this subcommittee consider a provision to explicitly allow BLM to utilize the 3,000-acre categorical exclusions for insect and disease infestations and wildfire resilience to by amending the Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003. ***SAF supports \$10.24 million for the PD program and \$112.1 million for the O&C program.***

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