

**Statement of Randy Moore, Chief of the USDA Forest Service
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Concerning President’s Fiscal Year 2025 Proposed Budget
For the USDA Forest Service
June 4, 2024, 10:15 a.m.**

Chair Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President’s fiscal year (FY) 2025 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The fiscal year 2025 President’s Budget for the USDA Forest Service discretionary appropriations totals \$6.5 billion for base programs and \$2.4 billion for the wildfire suppression cap adjustment (through the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund). The fiscal year 2025 Budget focuses on three primary areas: modernizing the wildland fire management workforce; sustaining the foundational investments critical to the mission of the Forest Service; and ensuring equitable access to and benefits from the National Forest System.

America’s forests provide timber, clean air and water, forage, and energy production. They support local economies through employment, trade, recreation, tourism, green jobs, and livestock grazing. They host and protect sites and landscapes of high cultural, spiritual, or recreational value. These benefits are at risk from wildfires, pests, diseases, invasive species, and drought, all of which are exacerbated by climate change. It is vital to continue to act now to mitigate these threats and protect our resources. Alongside our partners, the Forest Service will continue to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires to communities in FY 2025 through investments in the wildland fire management workforce and throughout the high-priority landscapes identified within the agency’s 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy. The investments highlighted below reflect services the Forest Service delivers through work on National Forests, partnerships with State, Private, and Tribal landowners, and our Research and Development mission area. These investments enable the Forest Service to restore long-term forest health and resiliency across landscapes the American people rely-on while ensuring equitable access to the resources on National Forest System lands.

Recent analysis shows that in FY 2022, Forest Service programs and work contributed approximately 410,400 jobs (average of annual full-time, part-time, temporary, and seasonal) and \$44.3 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Recreational visitor use, hunting and fishing, energy and minerals development, forest products, and livestock grazing generated 69 percent of the economic activity. The Forest Service continues to be a good place to invest and will maximize every dollar invested into our agency, making every dollar work for the American people. The citizens we serve deserve nothing less than to see the value of their money at work for their benefit.

The President’s FY 2025 Budget Request for Specific Priorities

The following investments align with and enhance the agency’s efforts to modernize and invest in our wildland fire management workforce:

- The 2025 Budget proposes \$2.6 billion for base Wildland Fire Management activities, investing in firefighter compensation, benefits, mental health, and wellbeing, and supporting the objectives of the agency’s 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
 - Provides **\$216 million to implement a permanent, comprehensive pay increase** for the wildland firefighter workforce, providing a more equitable wage, enhancing recruitment, and stabilizing retention.
 - **\$136 million for additional federal firefighting capacity** (570 more permanent firefighters and continued transition to a more full-time workforce) to enable the Forest Service to more effectively meet the demands of the increasingly year-round wildfire season, while improving the work-life balance of firefighters and support personnel.
 - **\$10 million for mental health and well-being assistance** to ensure our wildfire firefighter workforce are supported in managing the mental and physical aspects of their mission.
- In addition, the Budget proposes **\$25 million to address the urgent need for suitable employee housing** through necessary maintenance and repairs of Forest Service housing units.

The 2025 Budget proposes to fund the National Forest System at \$2 billion, prioritizing recreation service delivery, climate smart land management, forest products, law enforcement, and the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, while maintaining foundational hazardous fuels treatments to reduce wildfire risk:

- **\$207 million for Hazardous Fuels Reduction:** to return to previously enacted program levels and mitigate wildfire risk on 4.0 million acres with a focus on high-priority and high-risk firesheds, building on hazardous fuels funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act, and in aligning with the agency’s 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
- **\$58 million for Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness:** to provide critical recreation operations, planning, services, and improvements, with particular emphasis on creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans with a focus towards underserved and Tribal communities.
- **\$41 million for Forest Products:** to support the foundational funding needed to maintain the Forest Service’s ability to sell timber, which can be a critical component to sustaining local rural communities.
- **\$33 million for Vegetation and Watershed Management:** to provide support for healthy and resilient watersheds and landscapes, sustain the production of clean and abundant air and water, assist with meeting the Administration’s climate goals, and contribute to healthy and productive communities and Tribal Nations.
- **\$34 million for Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program:** to invest in communities and regions with a collaborative, common purpose in reducing wildfire risk and improving forest health and resiliency.
- **\$21 million for Law Enforcement Operations:** to provide critical law enforcement response for the prevention, detection, and criminal investigation of violations of Federal laws and regulations for the protection of visitors to National

- Forest System lands, Forest Service employees, and natural and cultural resources.
- **\$1.5 billion for National Forest System Salaries and Expenses:** to maintain the workforce needed to support the agency programs critical for forest health and resiliency, which complement the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy.

Further investments ensure that the Forest Service relies on the latest science and technology to deliver results on the ground and for the people:

- **\$470 million for Information Technology Capabilities:** continue modernization of our Information Technology systems that allow the public to better access our services, sustain emergency communication systems, and provide our workforce the tools they need to carry out our conservation mission.
- **\$316 million for Forest and Rangeland Research:** continue investments in research priorities, with a focus on climate change-related research including reforestation, carbon accounting, and fire and fuels research.

These investments continue to build on the historic investments provided by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) (P.L. 117-58) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) (P.L. 117-169). The Forest Service will continue to strengthen our long-standing work and relationships with States, Tribes, local communities, private landowners, and other stakeholders to adapt lessons learned into a coordinated and effective program of work to improve the resiliency of landscapes and watersheds, reduce wildfire risk, protect and maintain infrastructure, support outdoor recreation, establish tree canopy in nature-deprived communities, and invest in the reforestation of America's impacted landscapes.

The Forest Service cannot succeed in this work alone, especially when addressing the fireheds highest at risk, which are typically in multiple ownerships. Through meaningful communication, expanded partnerships, and broader community support, the Forest Service will increase the use of prescribed fire and other fuel treatments and the management of unplanned ignitions to reduce long-term wildfire risks. Fortunately, we have decades of experience working through partnerships and collaboration based on common values and shared goals across shared landscapes as set out over 20 years ago in the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy.

Ensuring Equitable Access to and Benefits from the National Forest System

The Forest Service remains unwavering in its commitment to the values of equity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for its employees and the public it serves. The Forest Service maintains the intent to focus on prioritizing activities that will provide benefits to disadvantaged or underserved communities. The Forest Service vows to proactively engage in actions that ensure a safe, resilient, and harassment-free work culture where employees are treated with respect and dignity.

The Forest Service will continue to invest in actions that facilitate access to the vital resources our forests and grasslands provide. This effort is twofold. First, we must ensure that those who rely on these services and benefits can access those benefits safely. Therefore, we are committed to improving the operation and maintenance of our extensive infrastructure portfolio

that includes buildings, dams, communication sites, recreation sites, roads, trails, and bridges. Second, to carry out this work effectively, the Forest Service is committed to continued intentional internal and external engagement with Tribal Nations and communities that live by, visit, and depend on national forests. The Forest Service is committed to identifying and removing barriers to access Forest Service programs and services for historically underserved communities. This will be done by integrating equity-centered criteria in the design, funding, and prioritization of all policies, programs, and activities to center equity considerations as part of the decision process. The Forest Service will also work to remove barriers and boost economic opportunities through improved access to contracts, grants and agreements, and permits.

Leveraging Additional Funding Authorities

It is expected that by FY 2025, much of the funding from the IRA will have been invested, but along with the tools and investments proposed in the FY2025 Presidents Budget, the Forest Service will continue to leverage funding within the BIL to combat climate change and confront the wildfire crisis, create new markets and technology for wood products, and restore forest health and resiliency through partnerships and collaboration across landscapes.

The BIL provided \$1.4 billion for hazardous fuels treatments, while the Inflation Reduction Act provided an additional \$1.8 billion for hazardous fuels work within the wildland urban interface. In February, we announced \$500 million for FY 2024 to expand work on the Forest Service's strategy to reduce the risk to communities, critical infrastructure and forests from the nation's growing wildfire crisis. From 2022-2024, we have invested a combined \$1.6 billion in the 21 high-priority landscapes identified under the agency's 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy as we continue moving these landscapes towards a maintenance state. These investments will help reduce the risk of wildfire to communities, Tribal lands, ecosystems, and critical infrastructure, including utility corridors and public water sources. Our work under the 10-Year Wildfire Crisis Strategy provides many values the public depends on and cares about including beginning to reduce risk to approximately 550 communities, of which 475 are underserved; 2,500 miles of power lines; and 1,800 municipal watersheds.

Through Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) funding, the Forest Service continues to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund (GAOA-LRF). In both FY 2024 and 2025, increased emphasis was given to using GAOA-LRF funding to address deferred maintenance on Forest Service-owned housing units as one step towards helping our employees confront the housing availability and affordability crisis in this country. In addition to the \$40 million Congress approved in FY 2024, we are proposing another \$30 million in housing-related GAOA-LRF projects to address this critical need. It is estimated that in FY 2025, GAOA-LRF projects at FS will contribute 3,200 jobs and \$360 million in GDP.

In closing, the President's FY 2025 Budget request for the Forest Service proposes a landmark investment that reflects the Administration's ongoing commitment to building and sustaining a robust and resilient Federal wildland fire management workforce, maintains funding priorities for risk-based wildfire reduction, and improves overall access to and utilization of our National Forests System. The FY 2025 Budget request also highlights the importance of restoring and creating resilient landscapes, improving infrastructure, and

removing barriers to access. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.