



The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

June 4, 2019

Dear Chairwomen McCollum and Murkowski and Ranking Members Joyce and Udall:

The Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2020 budget proposal would have significant adverse consequences for the nation's forests, of which 68 percent are state-managed or privately owned. The challenges presented by the administration's proposed budget would undoubtedly exacerbate future costs associated with wildfire suppression and undermine necessary, key investments in federal forestry programs that are vital to conserving all of America's forests—rural and urban, public and private.

Through the forestry agencies they lead, the nation's 59 state and territorial foresters deliver technical and financial assistance to private landowners and communities to improve forest health, ensure drinking water resources, bolster industry, and protect wildlife habitat. The USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) State and Private Forestry (S&PF) programs provide vital support for the delivery of this assistance, despite making up just 5 percent of the agency's overall budget.

In addition to S&PF programs, there are programs housed within the Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management and Forest and Rangeland Research budget accounts and the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) budget that promote forest management on state and private lands.

Your support for the following programs in the FY 2020 budget is critical to helping state forestry agencies address the many challenges outlined in their respective Forest Action Plans, improving the health of our nation's forests, and encouraging growth in a sector that sustains more than one million jobs in the United States.

State Fire Assistance (SFA) and Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA)¹

SFA is the fundamental federal mechanism for assisting states and local fire departments in responding to wildland fires and in conducting management activities that mitigate fire risk on

¹The President's Budget proposed renaming these programs "National Fire Capacity" and "Rural Fire Capacity" respectively.

non-federal lands. The program helps train state and local first responders who are often first to arrive at a wildland fire incident, as well as equip them with the tools they need to put wildland fires out efficiently and safely.

For example, in FY 2018, SFA provided over \$28 million in funding for hazardous fuels treatments, benefiting 1,065 communities in the wildland-urban interface (WUI). This funding led to the direct treatment of 49,400 acres of hazardous fuels (with another 184,808 acres treated with leveraged private funds), in addition to roughly \$3.7 million in assistance to conduct 3,882 risk assessments and complete fire management planning projects supporting 2,873 communities. SFA funding also assisted 12,829 communities through a variety of different activities, including training for 97,210 firefighters in FY 2018.

The localized support provided by SFA is crucial because most wildland fires (80 percent during 2017) burn within state and local fire department jurisdictions. Even when it comes to wildland fires on federal lands, SFA-supported crews are often the first to respond.

Our organizations are grateful for the increase in SFA funding to \$81 million in FY 2019. However, additional modest increases in SFA funding will help expand wildland fire preparedness and mitigation capacity for state forestry agencies. Attacking fires when they are small is the key to reducing fatalities, injuries, loss of homes, and cutting federal firefighting costs. The need for increased funding for fire suppression on federal lands has broad support. The need to increase fire suppression funding for state and private lands, where roughly 80 percent of wildland fires occur, and where many fires that impact federal lands begin, is just as urgent. ***NASF supports funding the State Fire Assistance program at \$87 million for FY 2020.***

The VFA program provides support to rural communities and is critical to ensuring adequate capacity to respond to wildland fires, reducing the risk to communities, people, homes and property, and firefighters. This capacity is critical because these state and local resources are the first responders to roughly 80 percent of wildland fires – whether on state, federal, or private lands. According to the USFS, during FY 2018, the VFA program helped provide assistance to 13,959 communities, train 21,868 firefighters, expand or organize 48 fire departments, and purchase, rehabilitate, or maintain nearly \$11 million in equipment. Our association greatly appreciates your work to increase VFA funding to \$17 million in FY 2019. ***NASF supports funding the Volunteer Fire Assistance Program at no less than \$18 million for FY 2020.***

Cooperative Forest Health Management

Among the greatest threats identified in state Forest Action Plans are native and non-native pests and diseases. These forest threats number in the hundreds, and routinely displace native trees, shrubs, and other vegetation types in forests. In the last 100 years, two tree species – the American chestnut and American elm – have been decimated, and within the next 50 years, it is estimated that we'll lose another 28 tree species including eastern hemlock, multiple species of ash and oak, black walnut, and American beech.

Forest pests and diseases are often introduced through international shipping and spread quickly through moving firewood and outdoor recreation. For instance, since Emerald Ash Borer was

first detected in Michigan in 2002, the invasive insect has cost homeowners and municipalities approximately \$1 billion every year since in detection, eradication, and tree replacement costs.

Right now, there are an estimated 81 million acres at risk of attack by insects and disease.² These losses threaten clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and jobs *on top of* setting the stage for large-scale, catastrophic wildfire. Nationally, forest pests and disease cause tens of billions of dollars in damages annually. The Cooperative Forest Health Management program supports activities related to prevention, monitoring, suppression, and eradication of insects and diseases through technical and financial assistance to states.

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program plays a critical part in protecting communities already facing outbreaks and in preventing exposure of more forests and trees to devastating and costly pests and pathogens. Since these pests know no bounds, it is critical to maintain robust funding for forest health management in both federal and cooperative lands accounts. ***NASF supports funding the Forest Health—Cooperative Lands Program at \$51 million in FY 2020.***

Forest Legacy

The Forest Legacy program provides critical federal assistance to states and private landowners to keep working forests working through permanent conservation easements, and in some cases, fee acquisitions. Each easement or acquisition is required to have a long-term forest stewardship plan.

Working forests play an important role in sustaining the economic, ecological, and social well-being of America's rural and urban areas through the jobs they support and the benefits they provide, including reduced wildfire risk, clean air and water, ample wildlife habitat, and beautiful recreational space. ***NASF supports funding the Forest Legacy Program at \$62 million in FY 2020.***

NASF also recommends that this program be fully funded from the Land and Water Conservation Fund and not be included in the discretionary budget cap. Report language requiring coordination with state foresters prior to recommendation and selection of easements and acquisitions is also recommended.

Forest Stewardship³

Working forest landscapes are a vital part of the rural landscape, providing more than 1 million jobs, more than half the nation's drinking water, plentiful wood products, and other essential services to all Americans. Private forests make up two-thirds of all the forestland in the U.S. and support an average of eight jobs per 1,000 acres.⁴ However, the Forest Service estimates that 57 million acres of private forests in the U.S. are at risk of conversion to urban development over the next two decades.

Programs like Forest Stewardship and Forest Legacy are key tools identified in Forest Action Plans for keeping working forests intact and providing a full suite of benefits to society. Through Forest Stewardship, state forestry agencies deliver management assistance directly to family forest landowners through the development and implementation of Forest Stewardship Plans.

²Tkacz, Bory, et al. 2014. NIDRM 2012 Report Files: Executive Summary. 2013–2027 National Insect and Disease Forest Risk Assessment.

³The President's Budget proposed renaming this program "Working Forest Lands."

These plans ensure that private landowners have the best information for managing their land, as well as access to additional resources. In fact, technical assistance provided by state forestry agencies is often a gateway to other effective USDA programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program.

In FY 2018, state forestry agencies worked directly with more than 475,000 landowners and developed 11,888 new Forest Stewardship Plans, most of which addressed acreage prioritized for management in state Forest Action Plans. Today, Forest Stewardship Plans cover nearly 24 million acres of private forest lands across the nation. ***NASF supports funding the Forest Stewardship Program at \$29 million in FY 2020.***

Urban and Community Forestry

Urban forests are important to achieving energy savings, improved air quality, neighborhood stability, stormwater runoff mitigation, reduced noise, and improved quality of life for the 83 percent of Americans who live in urban areas.⁶ Yet urban and community forests face serious threats, such as development, invasive pests and diseases, and wildfire in the wildland urban interface (WUI).

Since its expansion under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1990, the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program has provided technical and financial assistance to promote stewardship of urban forests in communities of all sizes across the country. Delivered by state foresters, this program leverages existing local efforts that have helped thousands of communities and towns manage, maintain, and improve their tree cover and green spaces. In FY 2018, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, educational, and research assistance to nearly 8,000 communities across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories and affiliated Pacific Island nations. ***NASF supports funding the Urban and Community Forestry program at \$35 million in FY 2020.***

Forest Inventory and Analysis

The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program (housed within the Forest Service's Forest and Rangeland Research budget account) is the only comprehensive inventory system in the U.S. for assessing the health and sustainability of the nation's forests across all ownerships.

FIA provides essential data related to forest species composition, forest growth rates, and forest health data used by state foresters, academics, researchers, industry, and others to understand forest trends and make smart forest sector investments. The program also provides unbiased information needed to monitor and effectively respond to changes in wildlife habitat, wildfire risk, and insect and disease distribution and spread.

As the chief partner in administering FIA, state foresters look forward to continuing their work with the Forest Service to improve efficiency in the delivery of the program and better meet the needs of the diverse FIA data user groups. ***NASF supports funding the Forest Inventory and Analysis program at \$83 million in FY 2020.***

⁴Forest2Market. *The Economic Impact of Privately-Owned Forests*. 2009.

⁵USDA Forest Service FY 2016 Budget Justification at pg. 119.

⁶USDA Forest Service FY 2018 Budget Justification at pg. 64.

Landscape Scale Restoration

The Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program **gives** states and **their** partners **critical resources to** address **forest health** priorities identified in Forest Action Plans and **to** achieve national goals as laid out in the 2018 Farm Bill priorities. **Three review** teams, comprised of state and federal officials with on-the-ground **experience in their respective** regions, **evaluate competitive** LSR project **proposals with rigor on an annual basis**. LSR projects **selected for funding** are, as a result, landscape-scale, cross-boundary, and outcome-driven.

LSR contributes to achieving results across the landscape and to making meaningful local, regional, and national impacts. *NASF supports funding the Landscape Scale Restoration program at \$20 million in FY 2020.*

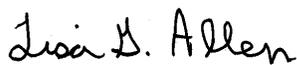
EPA Categorical Nonpoint Source Pollution Grants

In addition to Forest Service programs, state foresters also receive critical program support through the EPA, most notably through the STAG (State and Tribal Assistance Grant) categorical grants for nonpoint source pollution (often referred to as “319 grants”). These grants allow for “cooperative federalism,” and for many state forestry agencies, are essential support for water quality best management programs.

With on-the-ground implementation facilitated by state forestry agencies, 319 grants help private forest owners protect water resources in their forests, leading to clean water outcomes that benefit all citizens. *NASF supports maintaining level funding for the Nonpoint Source Pollution Grants – a level of \$170 million.*

State foresters assist in strengthening the economic backbone of America’s communities and the health of the forests surrounding them. We appreciate your consideration and would welcome an opportunity to visit and discuss our FY 2020 budget recommendations in person.

Sincerely,



Lisa Allen
NASF President
Missouri State Forester