

May 17, 2022

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chairs Merkley and Pingree and Ranking Members Murkowski and Joyce:

The undersigned organizations are strong supporters of the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program funded by the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). We rely on the inventory, data, and analysis provided by the program, which make up the backbone of scientific knowledge on the current state of the nation's forests. This critical information is needed to support sound policy and forest management decisions across all land ownerships and is increasingly important for decisions regarding carbon stocks, sustainability, and existing and expanding markets. We feel the needs of our nation's forests, coupled with the policy priorities of this Congress, make this an ideal time to significantly increase investment in this critical program. We thank you for the additional \$4.5 million in funding for Fiscal Year 2022 and look forward to working with you to further improve FIA's capabilities.

We urge Congress to support FIA with no less than \$32.4 million in program dollars and no less than \$52.9 million in salary and expenses in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23). We recognize that these requests represent a significant increase in funding for FIA, but we believe it is warranted given the many demands currently being placed on the program despite inadequate resources for implementation. **We further request that these increases not be realized at the expense of other critical programs under the Forest and Rangeland Research line item in the Forest Service budget,** or any other state or private forestry programs funded by the Service that also support our nation's forests.

Beginning in FY21, Congress restructured the Forest Service program budgets, separating salary and expenses from program funding. This means that FIA's salary and expenses are now pooled together with all other salary and expenses in the Forest and Rangeland Research budget line. We are concerned by this, as the new structure presents challenges in providing consistency in staffing and hiring across each program to best ensure program delivery. In addition, the lack of a dedicated budget line item (BLI) reduces transparency for partners and Congress. **We request that in FY23 you work with the Forest Service to establish a BLI for FIA that includes explicit funding levels for both program dollars and salaries & expenses.** This would be commensurate with how other programs within Forest Service State and Private Forestry and National Forest Systems are treated in the new budget structure.

In 2015, the Forest Service released an updated FIA Strategic Plan which outlines a variety of potential program deliverables at funding levels. The above funding requests represent the current funding levels needed for the Forest Service and partners to fully and adequately deliver on all the Congressional priorities outlined in the FIA Strategic Plan’s “Option C.”¹ This plan includes improved carbon and biomass estimates, enhanced timber products monitoring, enhanced landowner studies, research into land cover and land use change, and urban forest inventory. All of these items add immense value to the understanding of our nation’s forests but are not possible at current funding levels and are critical given increasing demand for FIA data.

Looking forward, we would like to draw attention to the growing importance of moving to a nationwide five-year collection cycle. Currently, funding allows the eastern United States to be measured every seven years, while the west is on a ten-year remeasurement cycle. In light of increasing frequency and severity of forest disturbances such as wildfires and hurricanes, the current cycles are inadequate to capture our rapidly changing forest landscapes. They also mean that the U.S. Government’s biannual reports to the United Nations’ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) must draw on data that is in some cases a decade old.

In addition to more accurate information regarding carbon stocks, there is also a need to make FIA data more robust and useful for other emerging uses, such as forest sustainability monitoring, wildlife habitat assessments, and much more. Furthermore, additional opportunities exist to direct investments in tools to quantify carbon sequestration in forests, forest soils and long-lived forest products. This should include additional investments in the Timber Products Output survey and in new technologies that enhance the core data collection program.

Given the increasing pressures facing our forests—climate impacts, wildfire, insects and disease, and development—the FIA program is more important now than ever before. We look forward to working with Congress and the Forest Service to significantly grow this program and ensure the accurate and timely inventory of America’s forests.

Supporting Organizations

Alabama Forestry Association	Association of Consulting Foresters
American Forest & Paper Association	Association of Forest Industries
American Forest Foundation	BBC Lands LLC
American Forests	California Forestry Association
American Wood Council	Caswell Thompson LLC
Arkansas Forestry Association	Chicago Region Trees Initiative, The Morton Arboretum
Arkansas Timber Producers Association	
Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho	Cleaves Consulting LLC

¹ <https://www.fia.fs.fed.us/library/bus-org-documents/docs/strategic-plan-docs/FIA%20Strategic%20Plan%20FS-1079.pdf>

Coastal Forest Resources Company
Composite Panel Association
Enviva Inc.
Florida Forestry Association
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Forest Stewardship Council US
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Georgia Forestry Association
Green Diamond Resource Company
Hardwood Federation
Hunters of Maryland
Idaho Forest Group
Illinois Forestry Development Council
International Society of Arboriculture
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Kentucky Woodland Owners Association
L&C Carbon
Lone Rock Resources
Manulife Investment Management Timberland
and Agriculture
Maryland Forestry Foundation
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
Merrill & Ring Inc.
Minnesota Forest Industries
Mississippi Forestry Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters

National Association of University Forest
Resources Programs
National Wildlife Federation
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
National Woodland Owners Association
New Forests
North Carolina Forestry Association
Ohio Forestry Association, Inc.
Open Space Institute
Oregon Women In Timber
Pinchot Institute for Conservation
Port Blakely
Maryland Association of Forestry Boards
Rayonier
Resource Management Service, LLC
Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
South Carolina Timber Producers Association
Society of American Foresters
Southeastern Wood Producers Association
Starker Forests Inc.
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Tennessee Forestry Association
Texas Forestry Association
The Climate Trust
The Greater Cumberland Committee
The Langdale Company
The Nature Conservancy
The Pennsylvania Forestry Association
The Wilderness Society

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Treated Wood Council

TreePeople

University of Tennessee

Virginia Forestry Association

Washington Forest Protection Association

West Virginia Forestry Association

West Virginia University

White Oak Initiative