

**Written Public Testimony from
Tom Martin, President & CEO, American Forest Foundation
Submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and
Related Agencies
March 20, 2014**

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) urges the Subcommittee to maintain critical funding for USDA forest health, stewardship, and education programs that are essential to keeping America's 22 million family forest owners, some 282 million acres, healthy and intact. Maintenance of these programs will help family forest owners get ahead of increasing threats, saving landowners, communities, industries, from expensive restoration in the future.

Given the tight budget climate, we recommend placing the highest priority on two types of investments; those that avoid larger future costs and those that protect critical public benefits. We urge the Subcommittee to maintain FY14 funding or newly authorized Farm Bill funding levels for the following priority programs:

- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service "Tree and Wood Pests" program;
- Farm Bill Conservation Programs & Natural Resource Conservation Service, Conservation Operations;
- National Institute for Food and Agriculture, Renewable Resources and Extension program and;
- National Institute for Food and Agriculture, McIntire-Stennis, Cooperative Forestry Research;

Additionally, we also urge the Committee to support funding the USDA Biobased Markets Program at the full \$3 million mandatory level and to encourage the administration to quickly implement rules to include forest products in the program.

Families and individuals own 35 percent of our nation's forests, stewarding more acres than the federal government or forest industry.¹ These private forests provide myriad public benefits—clean air and water, recreation, renewable resources that build our communities, and

¹ USDA, USFS National Woodland Owner Survey. 2011 Updated Data.

good-paying rural jobs. Unfortunately, new data suggests that by 2020, more than 18 million acres of family forests are threatened by housing development. Furthermore, almost 14 million acres are at risk of mortality due to insects and disease, while 29 million are at high or very high risk of destruction from wildfire.² To combat these ever increasing pressures, we must ensure these families have financial tools, technical information, and policy support to keep their forests as forests, for current and future generations.

The American Forest Foundation is a nonprofit conservation organization that works on the ground with family woodland owners through a variety of programs, including the American Tree Farm System®, to protect the values and benefits of America’s family forests, with clear ecological and economic impact.

APHIS Invasive Pest and Pathogen funding

We strongly support maintaining funding levels for the APHIS Tree and Wood Pests. This program funds eradication efforts for invasive species and works to prevent the further spread of invasive species like the Asian long-horned beetle and the emerald ash borer. Close to 500 species of foreign insects and diseases have become established in the U.S., and a new damaging pest is introduced, every 2 to 3 years. It is APHIS’ responsibility to prevent such introductions and to respond effectively when pests are introduced. According to the National Woodland Owner Survey, the threat of forest pests is a top concern for family forest owners. When an invasive species infests a family’s forest, it can destroy their investment, making it difficult to recover since most families don’t generate regular income.

Despite the increasing risk and impacts, funding for the “Tree and Wood Pests” account has been reduced by nearly 30 percent since FY11. The President’s budget now proposes cutting

² Family Forest Research Center, 2014 Preliminary Data

the program further, from \$54 million to \$45 million. When added to the reductions in previous years, this proposed cut of \$9 million would result in a 40 percent decrease in funding since FY11. Even at current funding levels for this budget account, APHIS cannot maintain efforts to curtail spread of insects that are already established, much less respond to new threats.

Farm Bill Conservation Programs

Farm Bill Conservation Programs, mainly EQIP, WHIP, CSP, and HRFPP, provide tools to family forest owners, leveraging the family's own resources to implement conservation activities on their lands—treatments that can protect the numerous public benefits we all enjoy.

AFF can be a strong ally with NRCS to achieve measurable on-the-ground impact with critical Farm Bill conservation program resources. Last year in Wisconsin, AFF and local partners, like Aldo Leopold Foundation, were able to engage woodland owners to actively manage their land for conservation outcomes, providing NRCS with a “pre-vetted” audience of woodland owners who were ready to implement conservation practices with the added incentive of EQIP support. Not only did this targeted initiative save NRCS field agents the time necessary for identifying landowners and preparing them for conservation action, but it also targeted these valuable resources in a defined ecologically important landscape, working toward oak restoration and improved interior songbird habitat.

AFF's effort also streamlined the process by initiating conversations to educate and engage these landowners with EQIP opportunities. We look forward to working more closely with NRCS on projects such as this in the future, especially through the NRCS-USFS landscapes initiative, including both the Lake Superior Landscape Restoration Partnership and the Upper Black Creek Watershed.

NRCS Conservation Operations

NRCS Conservation Operations funds technical assistance and outreach to landowners and supports implementation of Farm Bill conservation programs. Without these important resources, landowners would not have the professional expertise that they need to manage their land and enroll in conservation programs. These resources are especially important when considering that very few of the 22 million family forest owners are actively engaged in the management of their land, as evidenced by the fact that only 1.4 million of these landowners have sought professional advice for the management of their woodland.³

NIFA Renewable Resources Extension Program

As mentioned above, there is a significant portion of family forest owners that are not engaged in the management of their forest. This means that their forests are not fully providing the public benefits nor are they able to withstand impending forest health challenges. The Renewable Resources Extension Program supports outreach and education to forest owners, so they have the information they need to be good stewards of their land. The extension foresters that this program supports are essential to landowners, providing them with a spectrum of information from dealing with insect infestations to tax advice for new forest owners. The extension programs leverage significant state and local dollars and are a key partner to organizations like the American Forest Foundation.

NIFA McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research

The forestry research carried out by the nation's land grant universities and funded through the McIntire-Stennis program provides essential tools and information for family forest

³ 2005 U.S. Forest Service National Woodland Owner Survey Data

owners. This program also supports critical family forest research, so we can identify barriers to stewardship and how to reduce these obstacles. Finally, it helps train the next generation of forestry professionals to give forest owners the tools and technical assistance they need.

Promote Forest Products through USDA's Biobased Markets Program

The USDA Biobased Markets Program offers a ready-made way to promote forest products in federal procurement and in the private marketplace. With Congress' support of this program, we hope the Administration will implement the Farm Bill's new direction for the program, to include forest products, and work aggressively to promote these products in federal procurement and through the USDA labeling program. This will provide maintain forest conservation benefits, while also serving to support rural communities and rural jobs.