

**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, 2013**

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 11 million family forests, some 251 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.

We understand the difficult decisions you need to make. 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 green infrastructure that provide public benefits. With this in mind, we urge the Subcommittee to maintain funding for the following priority programs:

- Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service "Tree and Wood Pests" and "Specialty Crops" 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;

In addition, we urge the Subcommittee to provide leadership in fixing the USDA Biobased Markets Program to better promote forest products.

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, May 2008, *Who Owns America's Forests?*

good-paying rural jobs. But, wildfire, invasive species and other pests, development pressures, and shrinking forest products markets make it harder than ever to keep America's forests healthy and productive. 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 through a variety of programs including the American Tree Farm System®, helping these 11 million families be good stewards and keep their forests healthy for future generations.

APHIS Invasive Pest and Pathogen funding

With 58 million forested acres at risk from forest pests, we strongly support maintaining funding levels for the APHIS Tree and Wood Pests and Specialty Crop programs. These programs fund eradication efforts for invasive species and work 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 the number one 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.

The APHIS Tree and Wood Pest program's principle effort is eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle. This pest threatens the vitality of maples and birches, among other trees species, and could devastate forests from Maine to Minnesota at a cost of more than \$600 billion.

Similarly, the Specialty Crops program supports efforts to curtail the spread of the sudden oak death pathogen, among others, which can be spread through the interstate transfer of infected

plants. Without proper funding, this pathogen could easily spread across the United States, killing millions of high quality, valuable oak trees.

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 hazardous fuels treatments, insect and disease treatments, or other stand improvement activities in their forests—treatments that can save future restoration costs to the landowner and surrounding community. Take for example, the story of Keith and Karen Abrahamson from Michigan. Their forest was attacked by the emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle that destroys ash trees. Since the family did not have adequate resources to remove damaged ash trees and restore their forest, they enrolled in EQIP, which leveraged their funds to get their forest healthy again.

Harry and Joyce Pionke from central Pennsylvania faced a similar threat. In 2007, a combination of a drought and a gypsy moth infestation devastated their oak-dominated forest. Having just retired, Harry and Vickie could not restore the forest on a fixed income, but through CSP, they leveraged their resources to reestablish and diversify their woods, ensuring that the forest won't take a century to re-grow and the next gypsy moth strike won't be as damaging.

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 guidance that they need to manage their land and enroll in conservation programs. These resources are especially important when considering that very few of the 10 million family forest owners are actively engaged in the

management of their land, as evidenced by the fact that less than 5 percent of family forest owners have forest management plans. Without outreach to these landowners, many assume that leaving their forest alone is the best solution. However, this is no longer an option for forest owners, given the many threats impacting their forests. If left unchecked, these threats will undermine their forests and the benefits that all American's receive from them.

AFF can be a strong ally with NRCS in implementing technical assistance to forest owners by improving the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of NRCS outreach. In fact, last year in Wisconsin, because of work AFF and our on-the-ground partners like Aldo Leopold Foundation were able to do to engage woodland owners to actively manage their land for conservation outcomes, we provided the NRCS with a "pre-vetted" audience of woodland owners who were ready to implement conservation practices and more apt to do so with the added incentive of EQIP support. This saved NRCS field agents the time necessary for identifying landowners with very little land management experience, but ripe for EQIP stewardship opportunities. AFF's effort also streamlined the process by initiating conversations to educate and engage these landowners with the EQIP opportunities. We look forward to working more closely with NRCS on projects such as this in the future.

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 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.

Biobased Markets Program

In addition to these tools and resources, family forest owners also need healthy markets to ensure the revenue necessary to maintain healthy, productive forests. The American Forest Foundation encourages the Subcommittee to urge the U.S. Department of Agriculture to fix the Biobased Markets Program, to remove the disadvantage for forest products in the program.

Thank you for your consideration of these important programs. We urge the Committee, when considering its priorities for fiscal year 2014, to maintain funding for these key programs, to ensure family forests stay healthy and intact, and continue to provide myriad public benefits that all Americans enjoy. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share testimony as the subcommittee prepares a Fiscal Year 2014 Appropriations bill. We look forward to sharing more specific recommendations following release of the FY 2014 Administration Budget.

For questions, please contact Rita Hite at rhite@forestfoundation.org or (202)463-2594.