

**Written Testimony of Gerald J. Gray, Ph.D., Senior Vice President, AMERICAN FORESTS**  
**To the House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
**On FY 2012 Budget Proposals for the USDA Forest Service**  
**March 28, 2011**

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

**USDA Forest Service**

- **Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program at \$5 million**
- **Forest Legacy at \$135 million**
- **Forest Stewardship Program at \$29.5 million**
- **Urban and Community Forestry Program at \$40 million**
- **Integrated Resource Restoration at \$854.2 million**
  - **Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration at \$40 million**
- **State Fire Assistance at \$71 million (WFM) and \$39 million (S&PF)**
- **FLAME at \$413 million**
- **Legislative changes: Payments to Communities and Service First Authorities**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

American Forests is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) conservation organization whose mission is to connect, educate, and inspire people to restore and protect rural and urban forests. We work through public and private partnerships to reach out to people and to engage them in forest restoration activities in their communities.

We are pleased with President Obama's FY 2012 budget proposals for the USDA Forest Service. Given the current federal budget situation, the proposals reflect priorities that are consistent with ours and build upon recent initiatives such as America's Great Outdoors, which engages local communities through collaborative stewardship approaches, and USDA Secretary Vilsack's "all lands" approach, which encourages landscape or watershed approaches through which landowners work collaboratively toward restoring healthy ecosystems for their many environmental and societal benefits.

**Engaging Communities in restoring and protecting forests and watersheds**

American Forests has been strongly supportive of the Administration's efforts to reach out and engage communities through the America's Great Outdoors initiative and Forest Service Planning Rule, and we appreciate the degree to which these budget proposals allocate resources to programs that support partnerships and community-based efforts to address priorities for restoration and maintenance at a landscape or watershed scale. Many of the programs that receive strong support within this budget are those for which we have been advocating over the past 15 years with our community-based partners. It is exciting to see them being recognized within the Administration's proposals!

**Forest Service State and Private Forestry (S&PF)**

Our testimony focuses on the cooperative programs within the S&PF, through which the agency

works collaboratively with state and local governments, tribes, private landowners, and other non-governmental entities. These are the primary programs through which the agency provides leadership by reaching out to communities with technical and financial assistance to help address major forest-related issues on private forest lands, which comprise 60% of our nation's forests, and in urban areas, which contain 80% of our nation's population.

**Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP):** The Administration views this program as a cornerstone of the America's Great Outdoors initiative and proposes a significant increase in funding, from \$0.5 million to \$4.5 million. We have been a strong advocate for the CFP, recently authorized in the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, and we support this request for increased funding. The CFP authorizes the Forest Service to provide matching grants to local governments, Tribal Governments, and nonprofit organizations to establish community forests by acquiring and protecting forests for specific community benefits. These community forests may provide public access and recreational opportunities, protect vital water supplies and wildlife habitat, address the effects of climate change, provide demonstration sites for private forest landowners, and create jobs and local financial benefits through sustainable management. The CFP complements the Forest Legacy Program (FLP) and the Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF), each of which engages unique partners and utilizes different tools for land protection and stewardship.

**Forest Legacy Program (FLP):** The Forest Legacy Program has become a key tool for the Forest Service working in partnership with state governments and non-profit conservation organizations to protect environmentally-important private forests threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. The program provides funds for acquiring conservation easements on private forests, thereby protecting public environmental benefits such as clean air and water, fish and wildlife habitat, and recreation, while allowing these lands to be managed for conservation purposes as working lands. By permanently protecting important working forest lands, the FLP helps to create and maintain rural jobs and ensure a robust forest infrastructure. The Administration sees the FLP as a key initiative under the America's Great Outdoors initiative to support large landscape-scale conservation efforts and is requesting a \$59 million increase through the Land and Water Conservation Fund for total funding of \$135 million. We support this request and believe that it will help the Forest Service continue to work across boundaries to support projects that protect forests in key landscapes as identified in Statewide Assessments and Resource Strategies. These projects will be coordinated with other partners to create viable and cohesive zones where the economic, social and environmental values of forests are conserved.

**Forest Stewardship Program (FSP):** The Forest Stewardship Program is the agency's only program focused exclusively on the management of private forest lands, which constitute the majority (60%) of America's forests. The program provides landowners with the information they need to develop comprehensive, multi-resource management plans through a network of technical assistance providers. Because of its unique role, the FSP is central to USDA Secretary Vilsack's vision of an "all lands" approach to managing forests. The Administration requests an increase of \$0.8 million for the program, to a total of \$29.5 million. We support this request and the agency's proposed strategy to apply the program through the recently completed Statewide Assessments and Resource Strategies. The agency also proposes to achieve more effective program delivery through better coordination with program partners, landowner peer to peer

networks, and information technology advances. The Statewide Assessments will enable States to focus the program assistance and work collaboratively with partners to develop landscape-scale, multi-landowner approaches to achieve measureable stewardship benefits. The Statewide Assessments should also help identify and address opportunities through emerging ecosystem service and biomass energy markets. New technology, such as the Spatial Analysis Project, should also help the program make progress toward the long-term goal of managing significant landscapes, rather than scattered, individual properties.

**Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF):** The Administration's budget proposes to increase funding for the U&CF program to \$32.4 million, recognizing it as a critical program to protect and restore important urban landscapes and to connect urban people to the natural landscapes in which they live. We urge Congress to support an increase to \$40 million to meet the growing needs and opportunities for urban forestry programs in cities across the country that are struggling in these difficult economic times. Urban forests are integral to any community striving to reinvest in itself, to encourage an active and healthy citizenry, and to create a more sustainable environment and economy with green infrastructure. American Forests is working with partners in the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) to better understand the environmental, social, and economic benefits that urban forests provide and to encourage greater investment in the protection and restoration of urban forests. We are strongly interested in strategic tree-planting initiatives for carbon sequestration and energy conservation and in collaborative landscape-scale demonstration projects in urban areas that seek to achieve specific and measureable environmental, social, and economic benefits. In addition, consistent with the SUFC recommendations, we urge Congress to support \$8 million in the agency's Research budget for urban forestry.

### **National Forest System (NFS)**

#### **Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR)**

The Administration's proposal for an Integrated Resource Restoration (IRR) budget line item represents the Forest Service's new approach to restoration. The IRR brings together an array of programs associated with restoring watershed conditions and forest health and focuses on achieving critical work in the most important places. American Forests, through our partnership with the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition, has been supportive of the agency's efforts to develop an integrated forest restoration budget line item for a number of years. We believe that the Administration's proposals for FY 2012 will help move the agency in the right direction by encouraging collaborative efforts with communities and partners to identify and address priorities at a landscape or watershed scale. We also want to call attention to the importance of the Watershed Condition Framework as a tool to ensure that work is being applied appropriately and that activities and outcomes are being monitored and shared for learning and accountability. We support the Administration's proposed structure for the IRR, which identifies four key components, and its overall request of \$854.2 million. Within the *Restoration and Management of Ecosystems* component, we are particularly interested in the inclusion of previous Post-Fire Rehabilitation activities, as American Forests has been a long-term partner with the Forest Service in restoration tree-planting after destructive wildfires. Within the *Priority Watershed Restoration and Job Stabilization* component, we are excited to see an emphasis in working with local communities to identify watershed priorities and restoration activities that can provide

measurable social and economic benefits to local communities. We are also pleased with the proposed increase of \$30 million, to a total of \$40 million, for the *Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP)*. This program, authorized in 2009 by the Forest Landscape Restoration Act, has been one of our priorities for the last several years, and we are delighted to see that it is also a priority of the Administration's. The CFLRP authorizes federal matching funds for large-scale—at least 50,000 acre—restoration projects that have been developed collaboratively with multiple stakeholders. The projects selected for implementation through the CFLRP provide an incredible opportunity for advancing public-private approaches for landscape and watershed restoration.

### **Wildland Fire Management (WFM)**

**State Fire Assistance (SFA):** The SFA has become a critical federal program for one of our priorities under WFM, providing financial and technical assistance to communities for preparing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). CWPPs are a key mechanism for engaging local communities in a collaborative process to address wildfire preparedness and to direct resources toward hazardous fuels reduction work to help reduce wildfire threats. American Forests urges funding for SFA of \$71 million within WMD and \$39 million within S&PF.

**FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund:** As part of a broad coalition supporting FLAME over the past several years, we believe it is critical to fund FLAME at \$413 million. The intent of FLAME was to eliminate the need to transfer funds from other Forest Service programs in order to fund emergency wildfire suppression—a practice that undermined the agency's ability to implement other critical programs. Failure to adequately fund FLAME this year could force the agency to revert to the old practice and have disastrous effects on those programs.

### **Legislative Changes**

**Forest Service Payments to Communities:** The Administration proposes to reauthorize the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 for five years, with a discretionary appropriation of \$328 million. This *Payments to Communities* program, which has been funded through mandatory appropriations since 2000, has been essential to many rural forest-based communities over the last decade. We appreciate the Administration's efforts to maintain this program and urge Congress to work with the Administration to find a legislative and funding solution to continue support for this essential program.

**Service First Permanent Authority:** The Administration is proposing legislative language for permanent authority to work cooperatively with other agencies and partners on collaborative landscape-level projects. These authorities have been provided annually through Appropriations Acts since 2001. We have been encouraging efforts to make these legislative authorities permanent for a number of years, and we welcome these proposals for consideration.