

**Written Testimony of Scott Steen, CEO, American Forests
To the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
April 25, 2013**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Honorable Members of the Subcommittee:

American Forests appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony regarding our Fiscal Year 2014 appropriation recommendations. We understand the continuing economic realities facing the nation and the need for fiscal austerity, and we thank this Subcommittee for its support of key federal conservation programs in the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013. The return on investing in our nation's forests is great, whether those forests are public or private, urban or rural. The economic, social, and environmental benefits healthy forests provide are clear incentives for federal investment. American Forests' funding recommendations are generally consistent with the President's budget requests for the Department of Agriculture, Department of Interior, and the Environmental Protection Agency, with the exception of programs that merit a return to the FY 2012 enacted levels.

Founded in 1875, American Forests is the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the country with the mission to protect and restore forests. It has served as a catalyst for many of the most important milestones in the conservation movement, including the founding of the U.S. Forest Service, the Conservation Corps, the national park system, and thousands of forest ecosystem restoration projects and public education efforts. Since 1990, American Forests has planted more than 43 million trees in forests throughout the U.S. and 38 other countries, resulting in cleaner air and drinking water, restored habitat for wildlife and fish, and the removal of millions of tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

The economic benefits of outdoor recreation and natural resource conservation highlight the importance of American Forests' efforts. A recently published report found that the combined value of outdoor recreation, natural resource conservation, and historic preservation annually generates at least \$1.7 trillion in economic activity, supports 12.8 million jobs, and brings in \$211 billion in tax revenue.¹ As the report notes, "this sector of the U.S. economy is larger than the U.S. auto and pharmaceutical industries combined." Protecting and restoring our forests will ensure on-going economic and environmental viability for communities that rely on them for clean air, clean water, wildlife habitat, increased health and well-being, and recreational opportunities.

Department of Agriculture

U.S. Forest Service

Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration: As identified in the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration 2012 Annual Report², FY12's \$40 million investment resulted in: 4,574 full- and part-time jobs created and maintained; \$320 million in labor income; 612,000 acres

¹ Southwick Associates, "The Combined Value of Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resource Conservation, and Historical Preservation, 2013," April 8, 2013.

² People Restoring America's Forests: 2012 Report on the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program, 2012, http://www.americanforests.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/CFLR-2012-Annual-Report_LR-12.19.12.pdf

with reduced risk of wildland fire; 6,000 miles of remediated or decommissioned eroding roads to enhance clean water supplies; 95.1 million cubic feet of timber sold; 537,000 acres of wildlife habitat improved; and 400 miles of fish habitat restored. In sum, CFLR leveraged an additional \$45.4 million dollars towards collaborative actions in 2012. *American Forests supports the President's request of \$39.85 million; fully funding the existing twenty projects within the program and in line with the FY12 enacted levels.*

Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF): Urban forests make a significant contribution to the quality of life in communities across the country. In 2012, the U&CF program delivered technical, financial, and educational assistance to 7,499 communities and nearly 200 million people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. territories, and affiliated Pacific Island nations. In FY 2012, 78% of the total budget was distributed to states and partners for delivery of the U&CF program. Urban forests are integral to any community striving to reinvest in itself, encourage active, healthy citizens, and create a healthier and more sustainable environment with smart green infrastructure. *American Forests requests no less than the FY12 enacted levels for the Urban and Community Forestry program at \$31.3 million.*

Forest Health Management: Exotic pests and invasive species are among the greatest threats to urban and rural forests. Non-native pests already cost city governments \$2 billion each year to remove and replace trees killed by pests. Homeowners in these communities pay another \$1 billion per year to remove dead trees from their own properties. The substantial loss of trees in our communities impacts quality of life and property values. Funding for the Forest Health Program supports activities related to prevention, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants, as well as conducting forest health monitoring through pest surveys. *American Forests supports the President's combined request for the Forest Health Management Program on federal and cooperative lands at \$104.57 million.*

Hazardous Fuels Reduction: In 2012, 67,774 wildland fires burned more than 9.3 million acres. These larger fires destroyed 4,200 structures, including more than 2,200 residences. The Hazardous Fuels Programs at the Forest Service and the Department of Interior are the primary sources of funding used to reduce wildfire risk on Federal lands. In FY 2012, the Forest Service treated over 2.2 million acres—with over 1.8 million of those acres within the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Bureaus at the Department of Interior treated 1,000,273 acres in FY12—over 73% of which were in the WUI. *American Forests requests no less than the FY12 funding levels across the Bureaus at the Department of Interior and at \$317 million for the Hazardous Fuels Program within the US Forest Service.*

FLAME and Fire Suppression Funding: The Forest Service did not have sufficient funding for suppression purposes for the entire Fiscal Year 2012, and it implemented a funding strategy to transfer funds from non-fire programs to cover any unintended shortfalls. American Forests greatly appreciates this committee's efforts to include reimbursements for these transferred funds as part of the FY13 continuing resolution process. Estimates for the costs of suppression for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2013 anticipate that suppression costs will again significantly exceed the 10-year average. *In order to avoid such transfers in FY14, American Forests requests funding for the Suppression budget line item at the Forest Service and DOI that is no less than the 10 year average and to provide reserve funding (that is separate from and in addition to suppression funding) in the FLAME Accounts.*

Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm Bill and Conservation Programs: The NRCS and the Forest Service partner with private landowners, providing technical and financial assistance to help protect farms, ranch lands, and private forestlands. Funding provides for conservation programs that focus on priority landscapes most in need of protection, emphasize partnering with local constituents to efficiently implement programs and initiatives, and help create jobs and strengthen the rural economy. *American Forests supports the President's request for all NRCS Programs at \$3.86 billion.*

Department of Interior

Bureau of Land Management

Public Domain Forest Management: The BLM is entrusted with the management and ecosystem health and recovery of 58 million acres of forests and woodlands across 12 western states, including Alaska. The PD Forest Management utilizes numerous tools to achieve its goals, including stewardship contracting, which exchanges harvested forest products for forest health treatments and uses matching funds to treat greater acreage, and the Good Neighbor authority in Colorado to achieve forest health treatments on a landscape level across BLM and State lands and increases forest resiliency. Stewardship contracting must be reauthorized for this important work to continue, and Good Neighbor should be expanded across numerous states to achieve landscape-level treatments. *American Forests supports the President's request to return the Public Domain Forest Management to FY12 levels at \$9.84 million.*

National Landscape Conservation System: The System comprises more than 27 million acres of protected public land managed to maintain and enhance conservation values and allow for multiple, sustainable uses. The System's goal is to conserve, protect, and restore these important landscapes for their outstanding cultural, ecological, and scientific values. The NLCS manages units that include over 2,700 recreation sites and 22 visitor centers, and it serves approximately 14 million visitors annually. *American Forests believes the President's request for \$71.56 million is needed to prevent critical damage to these resources, ensure proper management, and provide for quality visitor experiences.*

Fish and Wildlife Service

Endangered Species Program: For nearly 40 years, the Endangered Species Act has helped prevent the extinction of our nation's treasured wildlife and plant species, many of which thrive in forested habitat. While the Act has made significant strides in protecting our most imperiled species – 99 percent of species protected under the Act have been rescued from extinction and 20 species have been restored to the point of no longer needing protection – there are still major shortfalls. Numerous species in need of protection, including the whitebark pine, are precluded from the list due to lack of adequate resources. *American Forests supports the President's request of \$185.4 million.*

National Wildlife Refuge System: The Refuge System, with 561 refuges of more than 150 million acres across the country, is vital to protecting America's wildlife and ensuring that these habitats are a priority. Since refuges are visited by approximately 45 million people each year and generate more than \$4.2 billion in economic output and more than 34,000 jobs in recreation

spending³, investment in the Refuge system is an investment in our communities. While it is well documented that an annual operations and maintenance budget should total at least \$900 million⁴, *American Forests supports the President's request for \$499.2 million.*

National Park Service

National Park System: American Forests was instrumental nearly 100 years ago in the creation of the national parks and continues to this day supporting the service that is the steward of the nation's iconic landscapes – 401 park units, 23 national scenic and historic trails, and 58 wild and scenic rivers. However, many of these forested parks are threatened by a series of stresses. Invasive species and uncontrolled outbreaks of pests have left these forested treasures vulnerable. American Forests is dedicated to restoring these parks, especially those in the intermountain west affected by the mountain pine bark beetle. *As such, American Forests supports the total budget request of \$3.115 billion.*

Urban Parks and Recreation: The reestablishment of this program to provide competitive grants improving existing recreational opportunities is essential to bring nature to the urban communities. These grants focus on engaging and connecting communities, especially young people, to their neighborhood parks through projects that would revitalize and rehabilitate park and recreation opportunities. As a leader in the urban forestry field, American Forests applauds the renewed efforts of the NPS and Interior in developing these environmental justice strategies to improve park units that will impact urban economies and the quality of life for urban residents. *American Forests supports the President's request of \$10 million.*

Environmental Protection Agency

Office of Water

All forests play vital roles in delivering clean water to communities of every size. Urban and rural forests offer fiscally-sound green solutions to the management of stormwater, water storage, groundwater recharge, and pollutant reduction.

Sustainable Water Infrastructure: The EPA is implementing a Sustainable Water Infrastructure Policy that focuses on working with states and communities to enhance technical, managerial, and financial capacity, which also addresses "green infrastructure" options and their multiple benefits. *American Forests supports the new infrastructure improvement projects for public drinking water systems' request of \$817 million for the Drinking Water State Revolving Fund and the \$1.095 billion for public water treatment systems under the Clean Water State Revolving Fund.*

Urban Waters Federal Partnership: This 13 interagency effort coordinated by the EPA helps stimulate local economies, create jobs, improve quality of life, and protect health by revitalizing urban waterways and the communities around them, focusing on underserved urban communities of all sizes. *American Forests supports appropriating FY14 at no less than FY12 levels.*

³ The Department of the Interior's Economic Contributions FY2011 report, p.21; 2006 Banking on Nature report

⁴ *Restoring America's Wildlife Refuges 2011: Assets for All Americans*, Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement