

Fiscal Year 2007 Agriculture Appropriations Testimony
Submitted to the House Appropriations Committee, Subcommittee on Agriculture,
Rural Development, and Related Agencies
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The Society of American Foresters (SAF), representing over 15,000 forest managers, researchers, and educators, supports sound management and stewardship of the nation's 749 million acres of forestland. We offer the following suggestions to facilitate improved stewardship and management of the nation's forests through funding for forestry-related programs within the US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, Animal Plant Health Inspection Service, and Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service. Given the understandable restrictions on the length of our testimony, we do not offer the in-depth analysis we normally provide but would be pleased to provide further detail upon request.

Today, the nation's forest face serious threats-- threats that will affect the provision of clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, forest products, and scenic beauty. At the same time, Congress is faced with serious budget challenges and funding is extremely limited. In recognition of this, we have limited our funding recommendations to three priority areas:

- Forestry Research
- Forest Health
- Family Forestland Management

Forestry Research

The key to good stewardship and sustainable, long-term management of the nation's forests is sound scientific information and transfer of this information in a usable format to practicing forest professionals and forest landowners. Forestry professionals must have access to new techniques and new research that will ensure they can continue to be good stewards in the constantly changing forest environment. We are deeply concerned with continuous declines in forest research capacity in the public and private sectors. This decline in forestry research is contrary to the critical importance of the nation's forests in global trade and in ensuring national health and welfare.

We strongly oppose the President's proposal to shift 59% of McIntire-Stennis Cooperative Forestry Research Program funds within the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service to competitive funding. Additionally, we urge Congress to increase funding for this program to \$24.5 million, \$2.5 million above the FY 2006 enacted level, with efforts to gradually phase in competitive funding with this increase while also maintaining some base federal funding. The funding provided through the Cooperative Forestry Research Program has provided the backbone of forestry research in the U.S at the various forestry universities and colleges across the country since 1962. At the same time, this program helps to train tomorrow's forestry professionals. Offering opportunities for graduate students to gain real research

experience while also getting an advanced education, helps ensure that this country retains the capacity to manage its forests today and in the future. A dramatic change as proposed in the FY 2007 budget would undermine valuable forestry research at universities and colleges across the country.

SAF supports the proposed funding level of \$247.5 million for the National Research Initiative Competitive Grants Program (NRICGP) within the Cooperative State Research Education and Extension Service, a \$66 million increase above the FY 2006 enacted level. However, we strongly urge designation of 10% of this funding for renewable natural resources research. The NRICGP is an important source of competitive funding for forestry and natural resources research although this could be greatly improved upon. Forestland constitutes 30 percent of the U.S. land base but currently, less than 6 percent of funding provided through the NRICGP funds forestry research. While the research currently conducted through this program is important, we believe that this program should place more emphasis on forestry and natural resources research to ensure forest professionals have the information and new ideas to succeed at a time when more and more demands are being placed on the nation's forests.

Forest Health

Across the country, over 190 million acres of federal forests and millions of acres of non federal forests, suffer from severe forest health issues and are threatened by catastrophic wildfires due to lack of management, insect and disease epidemics, climatic conditions, historical fire suppression practices, and other causes. Insect and disease problems include invasive species like the emerald ash borer, gypsy moth, and asian longhorned beetle; other insects like southern pine beetle and mountain pine beetle; and diseases like sudden oak death and white pine blister rust.

Many of the USDA research programs mentioned above are critical to providing new research and technical information to address these forest health problems. Additionally, the USDA Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) Emerging Plant Pests program provides important funding to detect, eradicate, and control harmful invasive species including the emerald ash borer, the asian longhorned beetle, sudden oak death, and the newly discovered sirex wood wasp. ***We urge you to increase funding to \$55 million within this program to address the emerald ash borer outbreak, \$30 million for the asian longhorned beetle outbreak, and \$9 million for the sudden oak death outbreak. This is a \$61 million increase in funding for these invasive species. Additional funding might be needed for the sirex wood wasp and we urge you to continuously monitor this invasive outbreak to ensure funding, when necessary, is provided in a timely manner.***

Family Forestland Management

With the future of 48 percent of the nation's forests in the hands of over 10 million family or non-industrial landowners, it is critical that this land remain forested. Family forestland owners are faced with severe challenges today, when owning forestland is often uneconomical and development pressures are fierce. A significant turnover in ownership of family forests is expected to occur over the next decade, creating a great

deal of uncertainty as a new, younger generation decides what to do with their forests. Additionally, according to a recent USDA Forest Service report, an estimated 44.2 million acres of private forestland are expected to experience substantial increases in housing density by 2030. Family forests supply approximately 60 percent of the nation's wood products. However only 3% percent of landowners have a written management plan and only 22% have sought professional advice prior to harvesting timber. These lands must be well managed with advice from professionals to avoid losses in productivity which make them susceptible to conversion to nonforest uses. There are a variety of federal programs that assist in accomplishing this goal.

USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)

Through NRCS' Conservation Operations account, family forestland owners receive much needed technical assistance for a variety of conservation practices, influencing the stewardship of these important natural resources. In addition, the Conservation Operations account helps ensure conservation programs that assist family forestland owners, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, the Conservation Reserve Program, and the Wetlands Reserve Program, can be implemented as mandated in the 2002 Farm Bill. ***We urge Congress to provide \$831.2 million for NRCS' Conservation Operations account, the FY 2006 enacted level. Additionally, we support full funding for the above mentioned conservation programs and will continue to work with NRCS to address family forest owner needs through these programs..***

Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP)

Authorized in the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, HFRP is the only reserve program with NRCS dedicated specifically to family forestland. The program helps these family owners conserve endangered species habitat on their lands. ***We strongly urge Congress to fund this program at \$2.5 million, the FY 2006 enacted level.***

Renewable Resources Extension Act

SAF recommends funding the Renewable Resources Extension Act through the Cooperative State Research and Extension Service at the authorized level of \$30 million, a \$26 million increase over the FY 2006 enacted level. We recommend a modest increase in this program because we believe this program has potential to greatly improve the nation's forests and their management.

The outreach and education provided through RREA is a service available to the over 10 million family forestland owners throughout the country and provides information for practicing forestry professionals to help them continuously improve the conservation and management of the nation's forests. RREA extension foresters are unique in that they take current technical and scientific information and translate it for application in the real world. This not only helps improve stewardship of the nation's forests but also helps increase the value of research investments by ensuring research is applied on the ground.