

Statement of Thomas Tidwell, Chief
U.S. Forest Service
before the
House Agriculture Committee
on
Implementation of the Forestry Title of the 2008 Farm Bill
July 20, 2011

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Forestry Title of the Farm Bill.

The Forest Service not only manages the 193 million acres of National Forests, but also works with partners across the country to help manage all 750 million acres of our nation's forests. Two thirds of our nation's forests, over 500 million acres, are in non-Federal ownership. These state, private and tribal forests comprise about 20 percent of our nation's land base. Management practices on these lands impact everyone, both socially and economically, as well as affecting the natural environment. The nation's private forests are a key component of America's rural landscapes, stimulating healthy rural communities and economies, and supporting well-paying jobs.

The Forest Service, primarily through its State and Private Forestry Programs, provides both technical assistance and cost share financial assistance to landowners and resource managers to help conserve and enhance the benefits from our nation's forests and protect them from harm. These State and Private Forestry Programs are delivered by an ever expanding network of partners centered around the State Forestry agencies. As a result, we work where Federal, state, and local interests intersect. We also work closely with a variety of Federal agencies helping them deliver their programs to benefit America's forests and the American people. These efforts are a key part of Secretary Vilsack's "All Lands" vision for our nation's forests. This federal

investment leverages the capacity of State Foresters and their partners to manage state and private lands and produce ecological, social and economic benefits for the American people.

2008 Farm Bill: State-Wide Assessments and Strategies for Forest Resources

The 2008 Farm Bill contained an increased focus on forestry and forest landowners. For the first time, the Farm Bill set priorities for private forest conservation: (1) conserving and managing working forest landscapes for multiple values and uses; (2) protecting forests from threats; and (3) enhancing public benefits from private forests (section 8001). To help ensure success in focusing on these priorities, section 8002 of the 2008 Farm Bill required each state and territory, by June 2010, to develop an assessment of the forest resource conditions within its boundaries and develop a long-term forest resource strategy to address threats and describe necessary resources. All states and territories submitted these Assessments to the Forest Service by the deadline and they now represent the first-ever “strategic plan” for the nation’s forests. The resulting Statewide Assessments and Strategies, or Forest Action Plans, provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends and delineate priority landscape areas in each state and territory. They offer practical, long-term plans for focusing state, Federal and other resources on priorities that will be most effective in achieving national conservation goals.

The approach for developing these plans varied widely among states and territories, reflecting differences in the way that national, state, and local priorities came together, the differing challenges each faced, and the resources available to tackle those challenges. Many states engaged in wide-ranging stakeholder involvement processes and involved a variety of partners in establishing their priorities. They used an “All Lands” approach that considered all forestland within their boundaries, regardless of ownership. The primary trends and threats facing the nation’s forests, as revealed in the Forest Action Plans, include changing ownerships of private forest lands, forest fragmentation, water quality and quantity issues, increasing urbanization, increasing amounts of Wildland Urban Interface areas, and the effects of climate change, wildfire, and invasive species. Each of these issues intertwines with the others. Cooperation and coordination across jurisdictional boundaries are clearly needed to address these issues, most of which can only be addressed meaningfully at a landscape level. By focusing on priority outcomes that address landscape-scale issues, the Forest Action Plans provide a tool to guide investments that will conserve, protect, and enhance our forests.

2008 Farm Bill: Forestry Programs

To achieve the priorities of conserving, protecting and enhancing the nation's forests, the Forest Service administers a number of programs through its State and Private Forestry Deputy Area that are authorized by the Farm Bill. Many of these programs stem from older laws, like the 1911 Weeks Act, the 1924 Clarke-McNary Act, and the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1978. However, in recent years, these laws have most often been amended in the Farm Bill and new private forest land programs administered by the Forest Service have been authorized. Also, Forest Service programs authorized by the Farm Bill are funded through discretionary appropriations each year.

This testimony provides an overview and status for six of the Forest Service programs, as well as the forestry programs housed in the Natural Resources Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency.

Forest Health Management – Federal and Cooperative Lands: The Forest Health Management (FHM) program is truly all-lands. It is made up of two components: Forest Health Protection on Federal lands and Forest Health Protection on Non-Federal lands. Funding for these components come in both the State and Private and Wildland Fire Management appropriations. The FHM program provides insect, disease, and invasive plant survey and monitoring information and technical and financial assistance to prevent, suppress, and control outbreaks threatening forest resources. FHM utilizes science, active land management, and technology transfer expertise to restore and sustain forest landscapes – across urban, private, State, Tribal, and Federal forests. Recently completed Forest Action Plans have, in many cases, identified forest health as a key state priority. These Plans are being used to help guide priorities at the national and regional levels. The technical and financial assistance that FHM provides help to ensure that forests remain healthy and resilient by minimizing impacts of native and invasive insects and diseases, and invasive plants.

The FHM program works collaboratively with other agencies, especially the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), to combat several damaging invasive pests, such as emerald ash borer, Asian long horned beetle, sudden oak death, and hemlock woolly adelgid. FHM also plays an active role in international activities. Many of the current forest health issues regarding

invasive and exotic insects and diseases are directly related to the international arena. During fiscal year (FY) 2010, FHM specialists were involved in approximately 50 international-related activities in 17 countries, including biological control of invasive insects, providing training in bark beetle management and identification, and technology transfer for aerial survey detection.

In FY 2010, FHM received \$78 million in funding for this work on Federal lands and \$60 million in funding for this work on non-Federal lands. Over the last three years, FHM has protected almost 4 million acres of Federal and non-Federal lands from invasive and native pests.

The President's FY 2012 Budget proposes \$118.9 million for Forest Health Management.

Cooperative Fire Assistance – State Fire Assistance: The State Fire Assistance (SFA) program provides matching financial assistance through partnership agreements to State Foresters for all fire management activities including preparedness activities, planning, training, hazardous fuel treatments, and the purchase and maintenance of equipment. Funds provide financial assistance, technical training, and equipment to ensure that Federal, state, and local fire agencies can deliver a coordinated response to wildfire. The emphasis is on improving fire planning, initial attack capabilities, and use of the Incident Command System and wildland fire techniques training for local fire agencies. This program also supports programs such as the Smokey Bear fire prevention campaign, Firewise, and Ready, Set, Go! Funds are provided in both the State and Private and Wildland Fire Management appropriations. We emphasize funding in areas that have developed or are developing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs), FEMA hazard mitigation plans, or other collaboratively developed hazard mitigation plans. Recipients of SFA funds are required to provide a 50 percent cost share match, which leverages the amount of work that is completed with SFA funds.

In FY 2010, the agency received \$110 million in SFA funds for this work, which were used, in part, to train almost 15,000 firefighters across the county and conduct over 19,000 prevention and education programs. In the past three years, this program has assisted over 13,000 communities at risk from wildland fire in developing management plans and provided funding for over 660,000 acres of hazardous fuels treatments near communities.

The President's FY 2012 Budget proposes \$78.8 million for State Fire Assistance.

Cooperative Fire Assistance – Volunteer Fire Assistance: Originally authorized in Title IV of Public Law 921-419, “The Rural Development Act of 1972,” the Volunteer Fire Assistance (VFA) program provides Federal financial, technical, and other assistance to State Foresters and other appropriate officials to organize, train and equip fire departments in rural communities (population of 10,000 or less) to suppress fires. A department may buy fire equipment, pay for training or training materials, or cover the cost of department incorporation, as long as the funds are matched. Volunteer fire departments receiving VFA funds are required to provide a 50 percent cost share match. Funds are provided in both the State and Private and Wildland Fire Management appropriations.

Volunteer fire departments play a major role in suppressing wildfires on Federal lands. Rural Fire Departments represent the first line of defense in coping with fires and other emergencies in rural areas and rural communities. They provide nearly 80% of initial attack on wildland fires in the United States. These departments are charged with the protection of lives, homes and business investments in rural America. Their presence enhances rural development opportunities and economic vitality, thereby improving standards of living in rural areas.

The Forest Service and the Department of the Interior land management agencies have entered into cooperative agreements with many rural volunteer fire departments for the purpose of protection of both communities and natural resources. A level of fire protection is attained that would be impossible without such cooperation. Interagency agreements provide a cost-effective means of enhancing fire protection.

In FY 2010, the agency received \$15.7 million in VFA funds. These funds were used to train over 9,000 firefighters in rural areas and helped to expand or create 18 fire departments in rural communities. In the past three years, the program has assisted almost 38,000 volunteer fire departments.

The President’s FY 2012 Budget proposes \$13.4 million for Volunteer Fire Assistance.

Forest Stewardship Program: The Forest Stewardship Program is the only Forest Service program focused on private forest land management. The program delivers assistance by leveraging a national network of forestry technical assistance providers and programs. Because

of this unique role – and since most of America’s forests are privately owned – the Forest Stewardship Program is central to addressing forest resource management issues. Individual forest landowners are assisted within the context of forest resource management issues that cross boundaries and encompass multiple ownerships and jurisdictions. The Forest Stewardship Program plays a fundamental role in keeping forests as forests, preparing forest landowners for forest products and ecosystem services markets, qualifying them for incentive programs, and maintaining jobs and diverse forest products markets in rural communities. Since its authorization in 1990, the Forest Stewardship Program has provided funding for more than 330,000 comprehensive forest management plans covering 38 million acres nationwide and has reached more than 5 million private forest landowners through a variety of technical and educational assistance programs.

In FY 2010, the agency received \$29.4 million in Forest Stewardship funds. These funds were used to conduct landowner education programs for almost 230,000 landowners and fund almost 15,000 new or revised Forest Stewardship Plans. In FY 2010, over 1.8 million acres of nonindustrial private forest land was being managed sustainably under Forest Stewardship Management Plans.

The President’s FY 2012 Budget proposes \$29.4 million for the Forest Stewardship program.

Urban and Community Forestry Program: The Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF) fosters the creation of healthier, more livable urban environments across the nation by promoting benefits of tree cover in urban areas and communities, encouraging maintenance of trees and community forests, and expanding research and education efforts intended to improve the understanding of trees’ economic, environmental, social and psychological, and energy conservation benefits. With 80% of Americans living in cities, suburbs and towns, there are strong environmental, social, and economic cases to be made for the conservation of green spaces to guide growth and revitalize city centers and older suburbs. The Urban and Community Forestry Program is helping to improve the condition and extent of the 100 million acres of community trees and forests in cities, suburbs, and towns where people live, work and play.

All Americans benefit from the multitude of services that the urban tree canopy provides, including improved human health and wellbeing, green jobs, energy conservation, improved air and water quality, carbon sequestration, recreation, and wildlife habitat. Urban and Community Forestry also provides support and funding for cutting-edge technologies and information, such as the “i-Tree” suite of local decision support tools that include urban forest benefits assessment, pest detection and storm response protocols.

In FY 2010, the Forest Service received \$30.4 million in Urban and Community Forestry funds. These funds were used to assist over 7,000 communities reaching a total of 177 million people. In the past three years, the program has helped over 21,000 communities.

In FY 2012 the President’s Budget includes \$32.4 million for the Urban and Community Forestry program.

Forest Legacy Program: The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) protects environmentally important private forest areas that are threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. In partnership with participating states, private landowners, and other conservation partners the FLP works to identify important forestlands and protect them for future generations. The FLP provides the opportunity for the continuation of traditional forest uses, including forest management activities and outdoor recreation. Using conservation easements and fee-simple purchases, FLP gives priority to lands that have important scenic or recreational values, riparian areas, fish and wildlife values, and other ecological values. Family forest owners and timber companies currently face increasing pressure to sell, subdivide, and develop their land. This program provides financial incentives to help private landowners stay on their land to conserve their forests, thereby protecting outdoor recreation opportunities, fish and wildlife habitat, water quality and resource-based economies. The program operates on a “willing buyer-willing seller” basis and is a non-regulatory, incentive-based land conservation program.

Funds for the FLP program are provided through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. In FY 2010, the agency received \$78.96 million in FLP funding. Since its inception, the program has protected over 2 million acres of important forest from conversion.

In FY 2012, the President's Budget includes \$135 million for the Forest Legacy program.

In addition to these programs, the 2008 Farm Bill authorized four new programs administered by the Forest Service, which are in various stages of implementation.

- 1. Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program:** This program, authorized under Section 8003 of the 2008 Farm Bill, directs the Forest Service to provide grants to Tribal governments, local governments, and qualified nonprofit entities to acquire private forest land that is threatened by conversion to nonforest uses, and establish community forests that provide accessible community benefits. The benefits include public recreation, improvement of environmental health, economic activity, and forest-based educational programs. This program received \$500,000 in funding in FY 2010 and \$1 million in FY 2011. The Forest Service is still in the process of finalizing the regulations for this program. The agency engaged in government-to-government consultation with tribes during a 145-day period, and conducted a 60-day public comment period, which ended on March 7, 2011. The Forest Service analyzed comments received during both processes and prepared final regulations for the program. The final regulation is planned for publication in the Federal Register later this year.
- 2. Pest and Disease Revolving Loan Fund:** The Pest and Disease Revolving Loan program was authorized in section 10205 of the 2008 Farm Bill. The program is authorized to provide loans to local governments to finance the purchase of equipment needed for the management of diseased or pest-infested trees. The agency has implemented an interim procedure to help address pest and disease issues, using its existing grant authorities to make grants to the states, which in turn, make grants available to local governments.
- 3. Community Wood Energy Program:** Section 9013 of the 2008 Farm Bill directs the Forest Service to establish the Community Wood Energy Program. This program authorizes appropriations of \$5 million per year for fiscal years from 2009 through 2012

for a grant program to provide state and local governments up to \$50,000 to develop community wood energy plans. Competitive grants could also be available to acquire or upgrade community wood energy systems that primarily service public facilities owned or operated by the governmental entity and that use woody biomass as the primary fuel. To date, this program has not been funded.

- 4. Forest Biomass for Energy Program:** Section 9012 of the 1008 Farm Bill directs the Forest Service to conduct a competitive research and development program to encourage use of forest biomass for energy. The agency's Research and Development Deputy Area would administer this program. To date, this program has not been funded.

Biomass Commercial Utilization Grant Program: The agency also implements a program, the Biomass Commercial Utilization Grant Program, that authorizes grants to an owner or operator of a facility that uses biomass for wood-based products or other commercial purposes, to offset the costs incurred to purchase biomass. Section 203 of the Health Forests Restoration Act provided an authorization of appropriations for this program through fiscal year 2008. Through appropriations acts, the agency has provided \$5 million of hazardous fuels funds for the biomass utilization grants each year since 2005. From 2005 to 2010, the grants have focused on assisting businesses and communities with the production, delivery, and utilization of wood residues. The Forest Service has provided grants for equipment such as grinders, harvesters, new trucking methods, energy production facilities, roundwood manufacturing, and production of wood shavings for animal bedding markets. In FY 2010, 13 biomass grant awards were made to small businesses and community groups in six states. In 2011, the emphasis was changed to focus on engineering design, permitting, and other preconstruction work for wood energy facilities. Grants for biomass utilization have totaled over \$30 million to 123 grant recipients in 21 states since 2005.

2008 Farm Bill: Cultural and Heritage Cooperation

Subtitle B, Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority applies specifically to the Forest Service's interactions and capacity for cooperation with federally recognized Indian tribes.

Section 8106, “Prohibition on Disclosure,” exempts certain information received by the agency from the Tribes from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act. Other provisions in Subtitle B relate to reburial of human remains and cultural items, temporary closures for traditional and cultural purposes, and gathering of forest products by Tribes.

In addition to the Forest Service, USDA’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) also have forestry programs authorized in the 2008 Farm Bill.

Natural Resources Conservation Service – Forestry Activities

USDA’s NRCS assists private forest owners in managing the nation’s nonindustrial private forests through technical and financial assistance. NRCS has a long-term combined objective for forest land with an expected outcome of healthy forest lands that are productive, diverse, resilient, and provide a wide range of ecosystem services. During the past 3 years, about 4.7 million acres of private forest land have received conservation treatment through NRCS assistance.

In 2010, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) authorized under the Conservation Title of the Farm Bill, provided about \$51 million (about 6 percent of total EQIP funding) to private forest owners to improve forest health. This level of assistance has steadily increased since enactment of the 2008 Farm Bill. Conservation practices funded by EQIP include forest health treatments, tree planting and reforestation activities, and plan development to help guide the stewardship of forestlands into the future. So far in FY 2011, EQIP has funded 1,443 new forest management plans. Additionally, over 20 percent of the FY 2010 funds under the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (WHIP) have supported wildlife habitat improvement on private forestlands with special emphasis in the Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration Initiative in the southeast and the New England/New York Forestry Initiative.

The Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) takes a different approach than other programs by encouraging existing good stewards to continue and expand their forest management. In the past two years, about 2.1 million acres of nonindustrial private forest land were enrolled in CSP. The

most popular CSP forest practices include prescribed burning, forest stand improvement, and building shelters and structures for wildlife. Additionally the Cooperative Conservation Partnership Initiative (CCPI) component of EQIP, WHIP, and CSP program funds were leveraged with resources from state and local governments and conservation organizations in seven focused forested landscapes with projects ranging from restoring salmon spawning grounds to reducing sediment loss from timber harvesting operations.

Through the Healthy Forests Reserve Program (HFRP), NRCS assists landowners in restoring, enhancing, and protecting forest ecosystems to: 1) promote the recovery of threatened and endangered species; 2) improve biodiversity; and 3) enhance carbon sequestration. Participants may enroll in HFRP through restoration agreements, contracts, and easements depending on their objectives. An FY 2010 HFRP project in Oregon is working to increase Northern Spotted Owl habitat while maintaining a working forest. The effort is a partnership between NRCS, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Oregon Department of Forestry and 11 private landowners. The project includes long-term plans for stand management and provides the landowners with assurances that if they manage their property in accordance with the plan, they will avoid future regulatory restrictions on the use of that land under the Endangered Species Act. In FY 2010, over 5,600 acres were enrolled in 13 states for about \$6.5 million in financial assistance.

Farm Service Agency – Forestry Activities

USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) implements the Emergency Forest Restoration Program (EFRP), a program that provides payments for nonindustrial private forest land to carry out emergency measures to restore land damaged by a natural disaster. Funding for EFRP is by appropriations. For FY 2010, \$18 million was made available by supplemental appropriations.

To be eligible for EFRP, nonindustrial private forest land must have existing tree cover (or had tree cover immediately before the natural disaster occurred and is suitable for growing trees). EFRP program participants may receive financial assistance of up to 75 percent of the cost to implement approved emergency forest restoration practices. A payment limitation of \$500,000 per person or legal entity applies per disaster.

EFRP program participants may implement emergency forest restoration practices including emergency measures necessary to repair damage caused by a natural disaster to natural resources on nonindustrial private forest land and to restore forest health and forest related resources on the land.

Conclusion

In conclusion, sound management of our nation's forestlands is important to all Americans. There are over 500 million acres of non-Federal forest land in the United States and recent research has shown that every year, large areas are lost to development and sprawl. The majority of the acres at risk, more than 430 million acres, are owned by families and individuals. Some of these private forest owners lack the financial and technical resources to hold on to and manage their forests effectively. Farm Bill programs offer protection for forests and support for these working landscapes by directing technical support and resources to these forest landowners – helping to keep working forests intact, providing quality jobs in rural America, and keeping privately-owned forest lands together for future generations.

The Forest Service's State and Private Forestry Deputy Area administers these programs through robust partnerships with states, private landowners, and other partners. These programs and partnerships help private landowners and rural communities care for their forests, strengthen local economies, and maintain a high quality of life.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the Forest Service's Farm Bill programs. I am happy to answer any questions from the Subcommittee members.