

Forest-Climate Working Group (FCWG) Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2021
Forest Investments to Advance Climate Mitigation and Resiliency and Improve Rural Economies
For the Senate Committee:
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and related Agencies
March 23, 2020

Endorsing Organizations:

American Forest Foundation • American Forests • Binational Softwood Lumber Council • Enviva • Forest Stewards Guild • Hardwood Federation • L&C Carbon • Michigan State University, Department of Forestry • National Alliance of Forest Owners • National Association of Forest Service Retirees • National Association of State Foresters • National Association of University Forest Resource Programs • National Wildlife Federation • Open Space Institute • RenewWest • Society of American Foresters • Sonen Capital LLC • Sustainable Forestry Initiative • The Climate Trust • The Forestland Group • The Lyme Timber Company • The Trust for Public Land • Western Pennsylvania Conservancy • Weyerhaeuser

Rationale: Forests and forest products currently sequester and store 15% of our annual carbon emissions. It is vital that we maintain this important resource by addressing rising threats to forest health and slowing forest conversion to non-forest uses. We can take steps to protect and increase this carbon benefit, and accelerate the ability of US forests to provide a sustained level of climate mitigation service to the nation. Many of these same investments can be leveraged to strengthen the resiliency of the nation's forests and thus protect additional public services beyond carbon such as watersheds, wildlife habitat, recreational resources and economic prosperity for rural and urban communities alike.

FY21 Budget Items

The FCWG recommended funding levels below focus on program needs to produce major positive steps in conserving and enhancing climate resilience and carbon sequestration and storage on public and private lands.

Invest in Sound Science and Data

USFS Forest Inventory and Analysis Program: FIA is the foundational measure for our forests nationwide and is essential to monitoring our progress. In FY 2020, the USFS increased overhead charges to FIA by \$3M which has negatively impacted program delivery and currently threatens the collection of data at the 7/10-year cycle. The FY 2021 President's Budget proposes an additional increase of \$1.45M to cover salary increases and pay raises. **The net effect is that an appropriation of \$81.5M is needed to simply maintain level program delivery from the historical funding level of \$77M. In FY 2021, we request no less than \$83M for the FIA program.** This will ensure that, at a minimum, the historical level of base program delivery is accomplished, which should include funding the collection of data on a 7-year cycle in the east and 10-year cycle in the west. We remain concerned about the low level of funding for the program relative to established needs for the information it provides and the negative impact of constrained budgets on data gathering, geographic scope, and sampling return interval and national consistency that is vital for evaluating forest carbon and resilience problems and potentials. This additional federal investment should be accompanied with language calling for improvements in this program efficiencies in 2021 and in future fiscal years to enable further program impact and ensure that FIA fully delivers on the Congressional mandate set in previous Farm Bills and the needs for forest owners, managers, and communities. Additional support for the FIA program is needed to ensure that we have improved data regarding carbon sequestration rates and storage and the impact of disturbance in forests to support growing data and analysis needs for climate mitigation, forest protection, and bioenergy.

USDA Climate Hubs and Related Investments in Applied Climate Science: The USDA Climate Hubs have demonstrated the capacity to provide useful science-based guidance for private landowners and other land managers. The Hubs

assure that investments in science are returned to the taxpayer in the form of usable knowledge and tools that millions of forest landowners and managers can apply to climate adaptation and mitigation problems. Continued investment in these Hubs, integrated into various program funding, to assist both public and private land managers is critical to cross-boundary success. Specifically, **the USFS Forest and Rangeland Research at \$315 million** is needed to ensure this and other climate research can be applied to managing all forests.

Promote the Use of Forest Products—Utilization in Building Construction

USFS Forest Products Laboratory

Woodworks: We recommend at least **\$2 million** investment through the USFS, or other funding source, into the initiative Woodworks, which promotes wood use in building construction through technology transfer, especially in non-residential buildings.

Life Cycle Assessment Research on Wood Products: We recommend a **\$1 million** investment in LCA Research through USFS FPL to ensure the most updated information about the environmental impact of wood products, with a particular focus on climate related information and the role of wood in sustainable forest management systems.

Enhance Resources for Private Forest Owners—Reforestation, Afforestation, and Restoration.

USFS Forest Stewardship Program: The Forest Stewardship Program helps landowners plan sustainable management, including carbon friendly and climate-smart practices, and to implement reforestation. The Forest Stewardship Program is the most extensive family forest-owner assistance program in the country. Management assistance is delivered in cooperation with state forestry agencies through technical assistance services and the development and implementation of Forest Stewardship Plans. The program works to ensure private landowners have the best information to help them manage their land for wildlife, recreation, aesthetics, timber production, and many other goals. The Forest Service estimates that 57 million acres of private forests in the U.S. are at risk of conversion to urban development over the next two decades. The Forest Stewardship Program is a key tool identified in Forest Action Plans for keeping working forests intact and for providing a full suite of benefits to society. We recommend an appropriation of at least **\$30 million** to advance carbon mitigation through this program, including funds to support tree-planting assistance on private lands.

USFS Landscape Scale Restoration: We recommend **\$20 million** this program, to stimulate cross boundary, landscape scale work that will measurably improve climate mitigation and resilience in our forests. We feel that the landscape restoration approach taken by the U.S. Forest Service and State Forestry Agency partners effectively leverages public investments and creates scale and efficiency that allows climate and carbon public and private benefits to be both cost-effective and sustainable. Climate-induced stressors like wildfires and insects and diseases, don't stay within ownership boundaries and thus, a landscape approach is needed.

Utilize Existing Grant Programs to Retain Forests—Diverse Tools for Different Partners and Contexts

USFS Forest Legacy Program: We recommend **significantly increasing funding** for the Forest Legacy Program through passage of The Great American Outdoors Act of 2020. The Forest Legacy Program is the most flexible and widely applicable federal program for permanent conservation of forestland and protection from development, and provides critical federal assistance to states, private landowners, and conservation groups to protect working forests through permanent conservation easements and fee acquisitions. Working forests play an important role in sustaining the economic, environmental, and social wellbeing of American communities through the jobs they support and the benefits these carbon rich forest systems provide, such as wildfire threat reduction, clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation space. The Great American Outdoors Act of 2020 offers a unique opportunity to nearly double the amount of annual funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, and accordingly the Forest

Legacy Program. If passed into law, this widely supported bi-partisan bill would permanently and fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund, thereby securing mandatory, and significantly increased, funding for the Forest Legacy Program. We urge you to support passage of the Great American Outdoors Act to secure this funding which will ensure this program continues to provide these benefits long into the future, and at an increased scale.

USFS Community Forest and Open Space Program: The Community Forest Program is a 50/50 matching grant program that is helping local governments, tribes, and non-profits to acquire and manage forestland threatened with conversion. We recommend **\$5 million** for this program, to fully tap the potential of these local and tribal entities to contribute carbon mitigation through forests

USFS Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program: U&CF directly assists state government, nonprofit organizations, and partners that manage and steward our nation's urban and community forests. Working with the state forestry agencies, the program provides technical, financial, research, and educational support and services to local government, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and tribal governments. We recommend at least **\$35 million** for the Urban and Community Forestry Program in FY 2021.