

**Written Testimony of Scott Steen, CEO, American Forests  
To the House Committee on Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies  
On FY 2013 Budget Proposals for the USDA Forest Service  
March 28, 2012**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

American Forests appreciates the opportunity to submit written public testimony regarding our Fiscal Year 2013 appropriation recommendations. We understand the economic realities facing the nation and the need for fiscal responsibility, and we thank this Subcommittee for its support of key federal conservation programs in the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act. 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 requests are generally consistent with the President's proposals, with the exception of an increase for Forest Health Management to \$128 million.

American Forests is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) conservation organization that restores and protects urban and rural forests. Founded in 1875, American Forests is the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the country. Throughout its history, American Forests 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 national forest and national park system. Today, American Forests' primary objectives are: (1) ensuring healthy forests and expanding forest cover throughout the United States; (2) restoring and protecting threatened forest ecosystems; (3) assuring that public and private forests are managed in ways that give high priority to ecosystem services; and (4) assessing and managing threats such as climate change, invasive species, insects and disease, wildfire, and conversion of land to non-forest uses to limit their impacts on healthy forests.

The economic benefits of our nation's forests highlight one aspect of the importance of these priorities. For example, combined spending on hunting, fishing and wildlife watching associated with National Forest System lands totals \$9.5 billion in annual retail sales, supports 189,400 jobs and provides \$1.01 billion in annual federal tax revenues.<sup>1</sup> The total value of ecosystem services provided by the acreage of natural habitats in the National Wildlife Refuges total \$32.2 billion per year, or \$2,900 per acre per year,<sup>2</sup> and home owners near parks and protected areas are repeatedly seen to have property values more than 20% higher than similar properties elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> Protecting and restoring our forests will ensure 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.

**Ensuring healthy forests and expanding cover**

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<sup>1</sup> Southwick Associates, "The Economics Associated with Outdoor Recreation, Natural Resources Conservation and Historic Preservation in the United States", October 10, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p3.

USDA Secretary Vilsack's vision for an "all-lands" approach to managing forests at the landscape and watershed scale fits well with American Forests' objectives of ensuring healthy forests in urban and rural settings whether privately owned or publically managed. American Forests strongly supports the following programs within the USDA to assist communities and private landowners with efforts to protect, restore and sustainably manage their forests.

*USFS Urban and Community Forestry:* American Forests works to better understand the environmental, social, and economic benefits of urban forests and to encourage greater investment in the protection and restoration of urban forests. We support the administration's request of \$28.04 million. While this is a reduction from the FY12 funding level, we believe that urban forestry activities will fare well in the new Landscape Scale Restoration Program which the agency proposes as a next step in its redesign effort for State and Private Forestry. We support funding the new Landscape Scale Restoration Program at \$18 million and believe that it will provide opportunity for innovative urban forestry projects at a landscape or watershed scale.

*USFS Forest Legacy:* 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. American Forests supports the administration's request for an increase over FY12 enacted to \$60 million.

*USDA NRCS and USFS Farm Bill Conservation Programs:* The NRCS and the Forest Service partner with private landowners, providing technical and financial assistance to help protect farm and ranch lands and private forestlands. The Forest Service provides key assistance for management plans on private lands through the Forest Stewardship Program. The NRCS has the responsibility for implementing most of the landowner assistance programs in the Conservation Title of the 2008 Farm Bill. In FY13, NRCS programs will support conservation practices on an additional 27 million acres at a total cost of approximately \$3.9 billion, and achieve a record total cumulative enrollment of nearly 329 million acres in conservation programs. American Forests supports full funding for these conservation programs.

### **Restoring and protecting threatened forests**

Specific forested landscapes need to be prioritized due to their level of degradation, ecological importance, or cultural significance. American Forests is encouraged by the Forest Service's initiative to increase the pace of restoration of the National forests, to prioritize those most in peril, and to address restoration needs through an integrated landscape-level approach

*USFS Integrated Resource Restoration:* The consolidated budget line item for restoration with specific performance measures has the potential to increase the rate of restoration in a much more focused manner. The 3-region test pilot created in FY12 was an important first step to fully understand how this integrated effort would work. American Forests' supports the concept and believes that better outcomes and greater efficiencies can be achieved through more widespread use of the IRR, particularly in combination with the agency's new Watershed Condition Framework. The Forest Service used this framework in 2011 and 2012 to complete its first national assessment of watershed health across the entire National Forest System, to identify priority watersheds and to prepare Watershed Restoration Action Plans. While there is currently no dedicated funding for this activity, the agency can make progress on implementing these plans through greater use of the IRR.

*USFS Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration:* American Forests truly appreciates the full funding CFLR received in FY12. The addition of ten more projects to the program will enhance the collaborative and science-based ecosystem restoration of priority forest landscapes while benefiting local communities. In the first two years of the program, FY 2010 and 2011, the cumulative outputs generated by the projects included: 228 million board feet of timber; 2,100 jobs created or maintained; \$80 million in labor income; 167,000 acres of hazardous fuels reduction to protect communities; 110,000 acres of fire prone forest restoration; and 198 miles of road conditions improved to reduce sediment in streams. American Forests supports the full funding of this program at \$40 million.

*USFS FLAME Wildfire Suppression Reserve Fund:* As part of a broad coalition supporting FLAME, we believe it is critical to fund FLAME at \$315 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.

### **Prioritizing ecosystem services**

American Forests is dedicated to promoting all the ecological and societal benefits that forests provide us. Prioritizing protection of these forests that provide the ecosystem services saves municipalities money in wastewater treatment and stormwater management. They provide recreational opportunities and protect wildlife. The Forest Service is not the only steward of our nation’s forests, as the Department of Interior’s Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency have numerous programs dedicated to the health and restoration of forested lands. American Forests encourages funding these programs at the Administration’s requested levels.

*BLM National Landscape Conservation System:* The System comprises 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. Of the 59 million visitors to BLM lands in 2010, approximately 20 million visited these units and recreation activities on NLCS units created approximately 20,000 jobs. American Forests believes the Administration’s request for \$69.55 million is needed to prevent critical damage to these resources, ensure proper management and provide for quality visitor experiences.

*FWS National Wildlife Refuge System:* The Refuge System, with 556 refuges on more than 150 million acres across the country is vital to safeguarding America’s wildlife and ensuring that these habitats are protected. Visited by approximately 45 million people each year generating nearly \$4 billion and more than 32,500 jobs to regional economies<sup>4</sup>, investment in the Refuge system is imperative. While we and many other conservation groups believe that an annual operations and maintenance budget of at least \$900 million<sup>5</sup> is needed, American Forests would urge Congress to approve no less than the Administration’s request of \$494.8 million, an \$8.8 million increase over FY12.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Department of Interior’s Economic Contributions*, 2011

<sup>5</sup> *Restoring America’s Wildlife Refuges 2011: Assets for All Americans*, Cooperative Alliance for Refuge Enhancement

*FWS 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 Administration's request for an additional \$3.74 million over FY12 to a total of \$179.69 million.

*National Park Service:* American Forests was instrumental nearly 100 years ago in the creation of the national parks and continues to support the Service in its role as steward of the nation's most cherished natural and cultural resources – 397 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, we support the Administration's request for funding the National Park System at \$2.986 billion.

*EPA Urban Waters Program:* No ecological boundaries separate urban, community and rural forests - and *all* forests play vital roles in delivering clean water to communities of every size. EPA's Urban Waters Partnership brings together multiple Federal agencies (including the Forest Service) to support stewardship and local restoration efforts to improve urban watersheds and accelerate water quality improvements by promoting green infrastructure, volunteer monitoring, and outreach to communities. American Forests supports the request of \$4.7 million.

### **Managing under a multitude of pressures**

With all that forests provide, we need to better understand the multitude of pressures they face and manage them in a sustainable manner. Forests can be managed in ways that mitigate the impacts of a changing climate, invasive species, insect infestation, disease, large wildfires, and conversion to non-forest uses.

*USFS Forest Health Management:* This program provides insect, disease, and invasive plant survey and monitoring information on forest health conditions on Federal and non-Federal lands and provides technical and financial assistance to prevent, suppress, and control outbreaks threatening forest resources and watershed conditions. The number of acres affected by only the highest priority pests is astronomical and the prevention and suppression needs are many. Since 1997, 41.7 million acres of conifer forests from the West Coast to the Rocky Mountains have been affected by mountain pine bark beetles. From 2000 – 2009, bark beetle caused mortality over an estimated 21.7 million acres in the intermountain west. American Forests proposes funding this critical program at \$128 million in FY13, a level higher than the Administration's request. Our recommendation reflects the need to restore funding to a level more consistent with its funding prior to FY 2012, when it was cut by \$25 million.

*USFS Forest and Rangeland Research:* The Forest Service R&D provides scientific information and new technologies to support sustainable management of the Nation's forests and rangelands. The priority research areas of forest disturbances, forest inventory and analysis, watershed management and restoration, urban natural resource stewardship, and localized needs are all integral to better understanding our forests. American Forests supports the FS Forest and Rangeland Research at the Administration's request for \$292.79 million.