Statement of Patrick Holmes, Senior Policy Advisor, American Forests,
Before the Forestry Subcommittee of the House Agriculture Committee
March 8, 2023

Thank you, Chairman LaMalfa, Ranking Member Salinas and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today.

I represent American Forests, the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the United States. Since our founding in 1875, our work has been guided by the simple notion that the health and resiliency of our nation's forests and communities, from coast to coast, goes hand in hand.

We led the First American Forest Congress in 1882 that marked the launch of the forest conservation movement, drawing 50,000 people. Our work helped to spark the creation of the U.S. Forest Service and the National Forest System with the Second American Forest Congress in 1905. We led the national effort to support passage of the Weeks Act of 1911, which established the first national forests in the eastern U.S. and subsequently helped rally the nation for the Memorial Tree planting program that launched the urban forest movement in America and the creation of the Civilian Conservation Corps, drawing on American Forests' experience leading restoration of European forests after World War I. In the aftermath of World War II, we led efforts to plan for the recovery of America's forests – hit hard to feed wartime needs – while simultaneously producing enough timber to build housing for returning soldiers. We helped to pass the National Forest Management Act to bring balanced, multiple-use management to America's national forests. We co-chaired the coalition that in 2018 secured enactment of the U.S. Forest Service "Wildfire Funding Fix," providing for adequate funding for wildfire suppression without the need to further erode or borrow from other programs. Most recently, we championed efforts through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act to support funding for wildfire prevention, forest restoration and innovative wood products. Notably, as part of the IIJA, we led the coalition effort supporting the bipartisan Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act, known as the REPLANT Act, which will provide the United States Forest Service with funding to plant or support the natural growth of more than 1.2 billion trees over the next decade.

With that history as context, it is our distinct pleasure to participate in this inaugural meeting of the subcommittee and to have this opportunity to formally thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your past leadership as a lead co-sponsor of the REPLANT Act, and for your current leadership along with subcommittee members in focusing dialogue and deliberations in our field in the run-up to a new farm bill. As our President and CEO Jad Daley often says, "We are one nation under trees" – forestry has a unique capacity to respond to some of our greatest challenges as a nation and to unite divergent interests around shared goals. We hope and expect that forestry will continue to

be a significant factor in the successful passage of a bipartisan and bicameral farm bill and look forward to being a leading pragmatic voice and resource for members and their staff over the coming months.

As members will no doubt appreciate, today our nation's forests, public and private, rural and urban, face new threats from severe wildfire, drought, invasive species and insects and disease, owed to a history of past management decisions, resource constraints and the complicating factors of climate change. American Forests is committed to ensuring our public, urban and working forest land managers have the tools and resources they need to respond to these new threats and to safeguard the many values our forests provide, from diverse wood products, invaluable water supplies and clean air and carbon sequestration to abundant wildlife habitat, resilience to extreme heat, and a multitude of outdoor recreation, employment and economic opportunities.

The Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 made significant progress expanding tools and resources for wildfire risk reduction and resilience on public and private lands, incentivizing management and restoration of working forested landscapes and bolstering markets for forest products that together lend credence to the notion that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure amid the threats facing our forests. These include provisions authorizing new financial assistance to states for hazardous fuel reduction projects that cross landownership boundaries; inclusion of the Timber Innovation Act provisions that establish, reauthorize and modify assistance programs to promote wood innovation for energy use and building construction and to facilitate the removal of forest biomass; and authorization of the Landscape Scale Restoration Program, a competitive grant program that promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes and furthers priorities identified in State Forest Action Plans or equivalent restoration strategies. American Forests and many of our partners believe that each of these changes and authorizations highlight opportunities for the subcommittee to build from the prior farm bill's success with additional tools and flexibilities to enhance our "all-hands, all lands" approach of stewardship and restoration and help build resilience in the face of threats that don't stop at fence lines. That approach, and the additional program improvements it requires, will be our focus and that of our many national partners during this farm bill cycle.

Within current authorizations, American Forests supports the strategic framework and spending priorities of the Forest Service's 10-year Wildfire Crisis Strategy to implement funding provided under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the Inflation Reduction Act and annual appropriations. The scale and impact of our largest wildfires demands an acceleration of forest management and restoration treatments, moving beyond "random acts of restoration" to targeted, outcome-driven investments to meet the needs of at-risk communities, infrastructure and natural resources. The agency's approach to public and partner engagement, expedited implementation of grants and agreements, and recent adoption of large-scale partnership initiatives marks noteworthy progress. Notwithstanding this progress, we also believe there are significant opportunities for further improvement to accelerate implementation of authorities and programs addressed in IIJA, and to further unleash partnerships among local, state, tribal nation, nonprofit and industry partners. In this moment, we must open the aperture to support new models of partnership and co-stewardship that foster predictability and consistency for needed programs of work and build from past progress.

American Forests believes that alongside preventative efforts, we must redouble our investment in programs for recovering our forest resources in the aftermath of severe impacts. Our forests are facing a chronic, quiet crisis: if we fail to accelerate reforestation and long-term recovery in the aftermath of large-scale severe impacts, we risk further jeopardizing the many benefits and values they provide in the long run. Wildfire alone causes approximately 80 percent of reforestation needs on National Forest System lands; exacerbated by extreme weather and impacts from drought and insects and disease, it creates significant need across all ownerships. Large, stand-replacing fires lead to sizeable areas without nearby seed sources for regeneration, allowing encroaching shrubland and invasive species to quickly catalyze type conversions that alter future forest composition and fuel dynamics. These changes often create conditions ripe for severe reburns in the form of future rapidly spreading, high-severity wildfire events. Although we often cite a history of past fire suppression as a leading cause of our current wildfire crisis, we may one day look back at our failure to respond to these long-term recovery needs of large-scale severe wildfire events as a dominant driver of our future fire risk.

A substantial portion of the over 4 million acres of potential reforestation needs on National Forest System lands stems from wildfires over just a two-year period from 2020 to 2021, when more than 2.5 million acres of National Forest System lands burned at high severity, adding to the 1.54 million acres of previously identified and verified needs.[1] Recent passage of the REPLANT Act, which removes a cap on the Forest Service's Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF), will provide significant resources to respond to these urgent needs. That said, the agency expects that annual expenditures from RTF – even with the additional help the REPLANT Act provides – will likely meet only about one quarter of the current identified needs, and may fall woefully short as severe conditions expand in future fire years.

At the same time, our systems, workforce and supply chain for reforestation have atrophied over the years among federal, state and tribal nation partners and must be modernized and expanded to respond to these emergent needs. Consider that our past seed collection, storage and nursery infrastructure were sited and undertaken to support reforestation in the aftermath of predictable harvest units and must now also be repurposed and expanded to service a far larger and more uncertain set of wildfire, extreme weather and insect and disease needs. In Colorado alone, our estimates indicate that reforesting just 10 percent of the severely burned acreage from 2020 fires would require 16.6 million seedlings. Optimistically, we have enough Ponderosa pine and Douglas fir (the workhorse species) seed in storage to grow 16 million seedlings total, meaning we have just enough capacity in the queue to address one-tenth of the needs from one single fire year, with zero capacity to reforest 90 percent of that year's burn scars and 100 percent of the damage from all other years. This anecdote is indicative of conditions across many states. Expanding our seed collection, storage and nursery capacity presents a critical need in this supply chain.

There is also a need to support improved planning, assessment and reforestation practices to tackle evolving, real-world recovery needs. Many of the standard reforestation practices arose from controlled field trials focused on testing regular spacing densities and subsequent treatments such as thinning, fertilization and control of competing vegetation. Today, we must

[1] "National Forest System Reforestation Strategy: Growing and Nurturing Resilient Forests," USDA Forest Service, FS-1198, July 2022.

not only evaluate the appropriate species and genetics for reforestation, we must also adopt planting and site preparation practices that improve success rates under anticipated future climate and weather conditions and integrate effective short- and long-term fuels treatments – all with an eye toward recreating the kind of diversity in stand structure necessary to withstand future wildfire and other threats. No funding source or program is currently supporting this applied research, planning and assessment work for reforestation needs among federal, state, private, tribal nation, nonprofit and land grant university partners; just as concerning, there is no programmatic avenue to fund innovating new approaches to fix workforce constraints that pose a huge threat to effective implementation.

In response to these pressing needs, we wish to highlight three top priorities for our organization for this farm bill:

First, authorize and significantly increase appropriations for the Reforestation, Nursery, and Genetics Resources Program (RNGR) within the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry deputy area to provide support for reforestation workforce, seedling and technical assistance needs facing state and tribal nation nurseries. RNGR is a vital but underfunded program that provides targeted technical assistance, primarily to state and tribal nurseries; it needs to be expanded to at least $10 million per year to meet a broader set of both technical and financial assistance needs facing state and tribal nurseries and must complement and not detract from RTF investments made through the REPLANT Act supporting federal lands and nurseries.

Second, establish a new competitive grant funding opportunity for reforestation research, nursery, seed collection/storage and workforce needs through state agricultural and forestry experiment stations, colleges and universities, research organizations and private organizations. Such a program could be housed within the USDA's National Institute of Food and Agriculture and help land grant universities and colleges of forestry lead consortiums of public and private partners to advance reforestation applied research, assessment and planning needs and contribute solutions to barriers in seed collection, workforce and infrastructure for scaling our reforestation supply chains. Investment in the best new ideas and efforts fueled by this competitive program would yield exponential returns to address many of the needs outlined above.

Third, establish nimble loan and loan guarantee financing for nurseries serving public, private and urban reforestation and recovery needs. Financing to expand and build new nursery capacity remains a bottleneck in the supply chain that constrains the scope and scale of reforestation initiatives nationwide. Financing in the form of low-cost loans and loan guarantees, along the lines of the provisions in Section 113 of H.R. 2639 in the 117th Congress, would help state, private and tribal nurseries develop, expand and improve quality control measures in response to forecasted demand, rather than simply current contracted supply needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the subcommittee today on behalf of American Forests. We look forward to partnering with the subcommittee on all facets of your forestry agenda for this farm bill and are grateful for all the work you will dedicate on behalf of the nation's forests, the communities in your districts, and Americans everywhere over the coming months.

Committee on Agriculture
U.S. House of Representatives
Information Required From Nongovernmental Witnesses

House rules require nongovernmental witnesses to provide their resume or biographical sketch prior to testifying. If you do not have a resume or biographical sketch available, please complete this form.

1. **Name:** Patrick Holmes

2. **Organization you represent:** American Forests

3. **Please list any occupational, employment, or work-related experience you have which add to your qualification to provide testimony before the Committee:**

   State of Montana — Helena, MT
   Natural Resources Policy Advisor to Governor Steve Bullock, 2017-2021

   United States Department of Agriculture – Washington, DC
   Chief of Staff to the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment/ Senior Advisor / Special Assistant, 2011-2017

4. **Please list any special training, education, or professional experience you have which add to your qualifications to provide testimony before the Committee:**

   Masters of Environmental Management, Yale School of Forestry, 2008

5. **If you are appearing on behalf of an organization, please list the capacity in which you are representing that organization, including any offices or elected positions you hold:**

   Senior Policy Advisor for Resilient Forests

PLEASE ATTACH THIS FORM OR YOUR BIOGRAPHY TO EACH COPY OF TESTIMONY.