

Forests in the Farm Bill Sign-on Letter

March 16, 2017

Dear Chairman Lucas and Ranking Member Fudge:

On behalf of the millions of forest owners, conservationists, hunters, anglers, forest industry, and natural resource professionals represented in the Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition, we ask for your continued support of forest priorities in the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization.

The Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition is a diverse group of interests that has worked together for over 15 years to build consensus forest sector platforms for the last three Farm Bills. We are greatly appreciative of the Committee's increasing support for forests over these last three Farm Bills. You have made significant policy improvements that are making a real difference on the ground.

Unfortunately, our work is not yet done, as we aim to ensure that the nation's forests continue to support rural economies and almost 1 million direct jobs while also providing much of the clean air and water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities that every American enjoys. With over half of the forestland (475 million) in the United States in private ownership, including individuals, families, corporations and tribal forest landowners, it is especially important that the Farm Bill continue to support these owners, many of whom provide these public benefits at little or no cost to consumers.

There are challenges that the Farm Bill can help address, which limit opportunities for forests to provide economic and other public benefits including:

- As much as 34 million acres of forestland are projected to be converted to development by 2060.
- While not attributed to forestry activities, there is the potential, particularly in the South, to nearly double the number of listed species subject to the Endangered Species Act; such listings could, however, significantly limit forest management opportunities.
- Wildfire occurrence (average acres burned) has increased by 160 percent from 1985 to 2015 and burns about 7 million acres of forestland each year.
- In the West, more than one-third of the high wildfire risk acres are family-owned lands, largely because these families lack resources and markets to reduce fire risk.
- Approximately 81 million acres of forests are subject to increased mortality from insects, disease and invasive plant infestation.
- About 80 percent of the 22 million family-owned forest landowners in the U.S. have not utilized assistance from professional foresters in making decisions about forest management and marketing opportunities.

Addressing these issues requires a combination of strong markets, effective technical and financial assistance, informed forest landowners, land managers, and communities, and continued research and education.

The Forests in the Farm bill Coalition asks that you include policy, programs, and funding support in the 2018 Farm Bill that will:

- Increase the long-term protection and conservation of forest resources from threats such as wildfire, insects and diseases including the use of fire as an important forest management tool,
- Conserve and enhance wildlife habitat through voluntary conservation activities, particularly habitat for at-risk species, to prevent the need to list species under the Endangered Species Act,
- Encourage the retention and perpetuation of forestland and associated values, goods, and services,
- Increase employment, manufacturing, rural jobs, and sustainable forest management through a strong forest products industry, and
- Improve forest conservation program effectiveness and availability to private landowners and land managers to address many of the above issues.

As in the past, we understand that the Agriculture Committees will be challenged with limited budgets and options. Given the work that your Committee has already done to reduce Farm Bill spending, we urge you to resist additional cuts to Farm Bill programs that will limit opportunities to craft responsive forest policy.

We also recognize that for many of the above noted issues to be fully addressed, the wildfire funding issues currently plaguing the U.S. Forest Service must be dealt with. As you know, as wildfires have grown, the increased costs of fighting these wildfires has consumed an increasing portion of the Forest Service budget. Today, wildfire fighting costs consume over 50% of the budget, whereas in 1985, these costs were only 15% of the Agency's budget. With more funds going to fight wildfires, less funds are available for Forest Service programs and activities that support the nation's private forest owners and forest industry. While much of the solution to this funding challenge lies in other Committee's jurisdiction, we ask that you continue to serve as an advocate to fix this issue, so improvements your Committee chooses to make in the upcoming Farm Bill can be fully utilized.

While each of our organizations has priorities within and in addition to these recommendations, we agree that a focus on these key priorities will help ensure that forests and the people that live in and work in them, can continue to contribute to the nation's economy and environment. The Forests in the Farm Bill Coalition looks forward to providing more detailed recommendations to address the above priorities as work on the Farm Bill continues.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to working with you as you develop the 2018 Farm Bill.

Sincerely,

Alliance of Landowner Associations
American Bird Conservancy
American Chestnut Foundation
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Wood Council

Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
CarbonVerde
Environmental Defense Fund
Environmental and Energy Study Institute
Forest Resources Association
Forest Stewards Guild
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Green Diamond Resource Company
Hardwood Federation
Land Trust Alliance
Lyme Timber Company
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forests Resources Programs
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wildlife Federation
National Woodland Owners Association
Northern Forest Center
Resource Management Service
Ruffed Grouse Society
SCJ General Services
Society of American Foresters
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Sustainable Northwest
The Center for Heirs' Property
The Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
Trust for Public Land
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Western Pennsylvania Conservancy
Weyerhaeuser Company
Wildlife Mississippi