

April 14, 2021

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Merkley and Chairwoman Pingree, and Ranking Members Murkowski and Joyce:

Over 50% of U.S. forestland is owned and managed by more than 10 million private owners, most of which are families and individual forestland owners. These landowners represent a diverse group of people who have many reasons for owning their forest land and represent a key constituency in helping address issues of forest sustainability and conservation. However, private landowners face barriers – including unforeseen costs and insufficient technical assistance – that can prevent them from taking necessary management action. As population growth and urbanization increase nationwide, private forest lands are threatened by land use conversion and development. Now more than ever, it is critical that we maintain our privately owned forest lands in a condition that supports the health, prosperity, security, and well-being of all Americans.

The Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) administered by the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service), is delivered in partnership with state forestry agencies, cooperative extension services, certified foresters, conservation districts, and other partners. Regardless of who provides assistance, the end goal is the same: to help landowners achieve healthy, resilient, and productive forests. Well-managed, private forests and woodlands offer a number of public benefits, including enhanced wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, recreational opportunities, watershed protection, and timber production.

FSP equips private forest landowners with the unbiased, science-based information they need to sustainably manage their forests now and into the future, helping to keep forests as forests. Sometimes this information is delivered to the landowner in the form of a Forest Stewardship plan; other times, it is provided through an in-person or virtual workshop or a one-on-one field consultation with a professional forester. In addition to delivering technical assistance directly to forestland owners, state Forest Stewardship programs are often gateways to other landowner cost-share assistance programming, like the USDA Environmental Quality Incentives Program,

state programs, and partner programs, that can help landowners keep their forests working and intact.

Today there are nearly 24 million acres nationwide managed with Forest Stewardship plans. From 2019 to 2020, the total amount of acres covered by current Forest Stewardship plans increased by nearly half a million acres. State forestry agencies routinely provide technical assistance to upwards of 300,000 private forestland owners annually. Forestland owners that have management plans are almost three times more likely to meet their management objectives compared to those without management plans. The FSP leads landowners to reach their management objectives while tying those objectives to the state's Forest Action Plan.

Increased federal funding for FSP will allow state forestry agencies to ramp up outreach efforts and provide additional technical assistance to landowners to ensure that private forestland acres are maintained. Forest Stewardship plans provide guidance for family forest landowners to keep their land healthy and productive and often serve as management roadmaps for several generations.

Although effective and in demand, FSP has seen a troubling 50% decline in federal funding over the last decade, accounting for inflation. Some of this decrease was due to the historical impact of the increasing cost of wildfire on the Forest Service budget. We appreciate the efforts of Congress to enact the "Wildfire Funding Fix" in 2018 and are now eager to see program increases to those programs that suffered cuts in the past, including FSP.

Thanks to Congress directing the Forest Service to transition to a more modern and transparent budget structure, we now understand that historically, roughly 43% of the federal funding appropriated to FSP has gone toward salaries and other administrative expenses within the Forest Service. For years, roughly 57% of appropriated FSP funds have been going to state forestry agency and other partner efforts to deliver the program on the ground. On average, state forestry agencies and other partners match federal investments 2:1, which means the impact of federal dollars delivered through the FSP have amplified on-the-ground impacts. The undersigned organizations are confident that increased funding for this program under the new budget structure will result in more landowners receiving technical assistance and developing management plans for their forests.

Following congressional direction, the National Association of State Foresters has worked closely with the Forest Service to modernize the funding allocation formula to state agencies for FSP, focused on improving program delivery with greater emphasis on performance-based outcomes. Under the new allocation formula, priority areas and priority resource concerns have been designated in each state and greater emphasis has been placed on providing technical assistance and implementing land management plans in those priority areas.

Keeping forestland as working forests is paramount to the ability of our forests to provide the economic, environmental, and social benefits that are essential to society. In order to retain and properly care for their forests, landowners need sources of revenue. Forests can provide traditional forms of revenue from harvesting of timber as well as other forms of economic return including from recreation and ecosystem services. The technical assistance services provided through FSP, support landowners in achieving their management goals, which in turn provide forest products, carbon sequestration, wildlife habitat, clean water and air, jobs, and opportunities for recreation.

The undersigned organizations recommend funding the Forest Stewardship Program for fiscal year 2022 at \$30 million (including \$22 million for program work under the new budget structure).

Alabama Forestry Association	Louisiana Forestry Association
American Forest Foundation	Maine Woodland Owners
American Forests	Maryland Forestry Foundation
American Resources	Maryland Forests Association
American Woodcock Society	Massachusetts Forest Alliance
Arkansas Forestry Association	Minnesota Forestry Association
Associated Logging Contractors – Idaho	National Alliance of Forest Owners
Association of Consulting Foresters	National Association of Conservation Districts
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies	National Association of State Foresters
Association of Forest Industries	National Deer Association
California Forestry Association	National Wild Turkey Federation
Connecticut Forest & Park Association	National Woodland Owners Association
Florida Forestry Association	Ohio Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Forest Landowners Association	Ohio Conservation Federation
Forest Resources Association	Ohio Forestry Association
Forest Stewards Guild	Ruffed Grouse Society
Forestry Association of South Carolina	Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition
Georgia Forestry Association	Society of American Foresters
Hardwood Federation	Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Indiana Forestry & Woodland Owners Association	Southern Regional Extension Forestry
Indiana Hardwood Lumberman’s Association	Texas Forestry Association
Kansas Forestry Association	The Nature Conservancy
Kentucky Forest Industry Association	University of Kentucky, Dept. of Forestry and Natural Resources
Kentucky Woodland Owners Association	Virginia Forestry Association
Longleaf Alliance	