

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Dear Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Udall, and Honorable Committee Members:

The undersigned organizations, many of which are members of the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC), thank you for the vital increase the FY 2020 funding levels, especially for the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry program. SUFC is comprised of more than 35 national organizations and corporations representing hundreds of thousands of professionals—and millions of supporters—who are passionate about trees and green infrastructure in our nation’s communities. The undersigned urge you to continue championing robust funding for several programs within your jurisdiction that support neighborhood and community trees and green infrastructure.

Our nation’s current and expanding 138 million acres of urban trees and forests are vital to creating and maintaining healthy, livable communities of all sizes by providing many scientifically proven social, economic, and environmental benefits to people. The ability to reduce air pollution and stormwater runoff, decrease energy consumption, mitigate the heat island effect, and improve human health are just a few of the essential services trees provide to communities. In fact, every year community trees and forests provide \$18.3 billion in cost savings related to reductions in air pollution, energy use, and greenhouse gases. With a projected 394 million Americans living in urbanized areas by 2050, investing in trees and better ways to grow trees to create livable communities needs to happen now.

The federal support and leadership through the USDA Forest Service and overarching Urban and Community Forestry program leverages funds ranging from two to five times for each dollar invested in projects and grants. The federal “seed” money is often the key to implementing these programs at the state and local level. Most smaller communities do not have the resources to practice urban tree management. The federal funds utilized by the states provides the resources to initiate their programs to manage the trees in their communities. These same funds set the bar for urban tree management in larger communities and at the state level, reducing redundancy and allowing consistency of care across the nation. The cumulative benefit to the country from each community achieves a national improvement to be recognized at the federal level.

USDA Forest Service: State and Private Forestry

• **Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF)**

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.

In FY 2019, U&CF assisted 7,755 urban and rural communities and nearly 206 million people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, US Territories, and affiliated Pacific Island Nations.

U&CF is a high-impact program and a smart investment, as federal support is often leveraged 2:1 (or in many cases significantly more) by states and partner organizations. For example, over 1.2 million volunteer hours were documented for the program in 2019. There are now 9,245 communities that have adopted and can present documentation of local/statewide ordinances or policies that focus on community trees. U&CF engages citizens in cities and towns, brings together diverse partners with public and private resources, and demonstrates that federal investment can have huge and lasting impacts on communities of all sizes.

The undersigned deeply appreciate this subcommittee's strong support and understanding of the program's diverse and unique benefits. The programmatic increase provided in FY 2020 is actively helping to prevent and address outbreaks of devastating pests—like the Emerald Ash Borer and the Asian Longhorned Beetle—and reducing the loss of trees and forests in both urban and rural areas. Zeroing out this important program would completely erode the capacity that has been developed in cities and towns of all sizes and jeopardize many local public and private partnerships and collaborative projects where federal assistance is essential. **The undersigned recommend at least \$35 million for the Urban and Community Forestry Program in FY 2021.**

- **Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR)**

National priority Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) projects are a key way that states, in collaboration with the USDA Forest Service and other partners, address critical forest priorities across the landscape. LSR projects focus on the most critical priorities identified in each state's Forest Action Plan and on achieving national goals as laid out in the State and Private Forestry national themes. The competitive grant process ensures innovative approaches to restoration work are proposed and priority is given to projects that further the advancement of State Forest Action Plans. Therefore, LSR contributes to achieving results across the landscape and making meaningful local, regional, and national impacts. Based on changes to the program in the 2018 Farm Bill, LSR grants will now be focused on providing landscape scale restoration benefits to rural areas. Through LSR, innovative urban and community forestry projects can still be proposed in small and rural communities across the country. **The undersigned recommend \$20 million for the Landscape Scale Restoration program in FY 2021.**

- **Community Forests and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP)**

CFP has made substantial progress in preserving forests by increasing opportunities for Americans to connect with forests in their own communities and fostering new public-private partnerships. Since its first grant round in FY 2012, CFP has supported 51 community forest projects across 21 states and territories and leveraged more than twice the federal investment. Thanks to these partnerships, more than 12,300 acres of private forestlands—much of it in rural areas—have been, or soon will be, acquired to create new—or expand existing—community forests. **The undersigned recommend \$5 million for CFP in FY 2021.**

- **Forest Health Management**

Forests across the country are threatened by increasing numbers of insects and disease pathogens introduced from abroad and entering this country through urban ports. As a result, municipal governments across the US are spending an estimated \$2.4 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by non-native pests. Homeowners are spending an additional \$1 billion to remove and replace trees on their properties and are absorbing an additional \$1.5 billion in reduced property values. In recent years, new pests such as the spotted lanternfly, South American palm weevil, rapid ohia death, and beech leaf disease threaten new areas. These pests

often spread from the cities to rural and wildland forests, where the full spectrum of forest values is at risk. This program provides essential expertise and assistance to state and municipal agencies and private landowners working to prevent these pests' spread and minimize the damage they cause. **The undersigned recommend \$51 million for cooperative lands under the Forest Health Management program in FY 2021.**

USDA Forest Service: Forest and Rangeland Research

Improving the health—and maximizing the economic, social, and environmental benefits—of our nation's trees requires a strong investment in USDA Forest Service Research and Development (R&D). We are troubled by the proposal to cut the overall R&D budget by 25% and eliminate research related to urban stewardship. **The undersigned recommend \$315 million for the overall R&D program for FY 2021.**

- **Urban and Community Forestry Research**

The Forest Service R&D program provides critical financial support for urban forestry research activities to develop information and tools for understanding conditions and trends in our nation's urban and community forests. USDA Forest Service researchers have made huge strides in recent years through collaborative efforts to develop new tools—such as i-Tree—for mapping current tree cover, assessing trends, developing local strategies, and building greater understanding of the environmental, economic, and social services that trees and forests provide to communities. **The undersigned urge you to continue including language in Interior Appropriations reports encouraging the USDA Forest Service to maintain a strong and vibrant urban forest research program.**

- **Non-Native Insects and Diseases Research**

Among the major research challenges facing R&D is the destruction of our nation's urban forests caused by non-native insects and diseases. The health of rural and wildland forests depends on USDA Forest Service R&D developing better tools for pest detection and protective strategies, including chemical and biological controls and breeding of trees resistant to pests. Hawaiian forests are being decimated by new pathogens and scientists recently learned about previously unknown pathogens in Southeast Asia that might threaten oaks, maples, pines and spruces across the US. The Pacific Southwest Research Station—slated for closure by the Administration—has the greatest expertise in addressing these emerging threats. **The undersigned urge you to reject proposals to close research stations and include language in the Interior Appropriations report encouraging the USDA Forest Service to increase funding for research targeting non-native insects and pathogens.**

- **Urban Forests in Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)**

The collaborative efforts between SUFC and the USDA Forest Service brought urban forest data into the mainstream of the agency's national data-collection program. FIA has long provided the nation's forest census, but it had not historically included urban areas because of its definition of forests. **The undersigned recommend \$83 million for the FIA program in FY 2021. With that funding level, we ask you to encourage the USDA Forest Service to continue and strengthen its efforts to integrate urban forest data into FIA so that its critical data-collection efforts address all of our nation's forests, including our current and expanding 138 million acres of urban forest land. We also urge this subcommittee to ensure that funding increases for FIA do not come at the expense of other Forest Service R&D programs.**

Environmental Protection Agency

- **Clean Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF)**

Green infrastructure, including urban forests, can be a cost-effective and resilient approach to managing stormwater. The use of green infrastructure for stormwater control also provides many community co-benefits enumerated above. SUFC is pleased that EPA supports the use of green infrastructure for stormwater management and that green infrastructure is an eligible use under the CWSRF—a critical financing program for local communities investing in water infrastructure. **The undersigned support robust funding for CWSRF, along with efforts to expand the use of green infrastructure to 20% to meet Clean Water Act goals.**

Supporting Organizations

Alliance for Community Trees
American Forests
American Planning Association
American Society of Consulting Arborists
Arbor Day Foundation
California Urban Forests Council
Casey Trees
Center for Invasive Species Prevention
Charleston Tree Experts
Cleveland Clinic
Corazon Latino
Green Infrastructure Center
International Society of Arboriculture
Keep America Beautiful
National Association of Clean Water Agencies
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Landscape Professionals
National Association of State Foresters
National Recreation and Park Association
Park Rx America
Professional Grounds Management Society
SavATree, LLC
Society of American Foresters
Society of Municipal Arborists
Student Conservation Association
Trees Forever
The Davey Institute
The Nature Conservancy
The Trust for Public Land
TREE Fund
Water Environment Federation
Wildlife Habitat Council