

**Statement of Randy Moore, Chief of the USDA Forest Service
Before the Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
Concerning President's Fiscal Year 2023 Proposed Budget
For the USDA Forest Service
May 4, 2022, 10:00 a.m**

Chair Merkley, Ranking Member Murkowski, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify on the President's fiscal year (FY) 2023 Budget request for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service.

The FY 2023 President's Budget for the USDA Forest Service discretionary appropriations totals \$9 billion, including \$2.21 billion for the wildfire suppression cap adjustment (in the Wildfire Suppression Operations Reserve Fund). In addition to discretionary appropriations, the request includes \$743 million in mandatory funding for Permanent and Trust funds. To address the wildfire crisis we are facing, the FY 2023 request focuses on risk-based wildland fire management; compensation for wildland firefighters; tackling the climate crisis; improving infrastructure, providing economic relief and supporting jobs; and advancing racial equity. To improve the conditions we are seeing on the ground, it will take use of the best available science; hard work shoulder to shoulder with partners; use of all the tools in our toolbox; and a robust workforce.

Since 1905, the Forest Service has served the American people through conservation. Our mission is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. We work with partners through our Research and Development and State and Private Forestry mission areas to sustain all of the Nation's forests, about 766 million acres in multiple ownerships. Overall, that is about a third of the Nation's land area. We directly manage the national forests and grasslands, including about 19 percent of the Nation's forests. The national forests and grasslands cover about 193 million acres on 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands in 43 states and Puerto Rico. We also work with countries around the globe to support sustainable forestry and the conservation of the natural resources that billions of people depend on for their livelihoods.

Our purpose is to sustain healthy, resilient landscapes for all the benefits that people get from them, both now and for generations to come. We meet the needs of our citizens by conserving the values, benefits, goods, and services from the Nation's forests and grasslands. People depend on the Nation's forests and grasslands for their social, economic, and ecological well-being. The Forest Service meets those needs in myriad ways.

Water is the source of all life, and about 53 percent of the Nation's total runoff from rivers and streams comes from forests. Almost 18 percent comes from the National Forest System alone, even though it occupies only about 8 percent of the Nation's land area. In the West, more than half of the

total regional runoff comes from the national forests and grasslands. Nationwide, more than 60 million people depend on the national forests and grasslands for their drinking water. More than 3,400 communities in 36 states depend on the National Forest System for their municipal water supplies, including cities like Portland, Denver, and Atlanta.

Climate change is causing historic droughts in the West and placing water supplies and other natural resources at risk. Carbon sequestration is vital for combating climate change. Forests take up vast quantities of carbon in trees and soils—in fact, forests are America’s largest terrestrial carbon sink. Our forests, plus harvested wood products and urban forests, offset almost 15 percent of the Nation’s total carbon dioxide emissions and almost 12 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions. The National Forest System alone stores almost 14 billion metric tons of carbon, or about a quarter of the Nation’s carbon storage in forests. Each year, the National Forest System adds about 31 million metric tons of carbon of net gain.

The National Forest System is a tremendous source of jobs and economic opportunities for Americans. Many rural communities depend on the National Forest System for roads and other infrastructure as well as for employment, goods, and services. In fiscal year 2020, the National Forest System supported more than 370,000 jobs and contributed more than \$35 billion to the national gross domestic product (GDP). Outdoor recreation alone accounted for 45 percent of those jobs and 38 percent of the contribution to the GDP in 2020. Forest landscape management and investments, including fuels and forest health treatments, accounted for more than a quarter of the jobs and 31 percent of the contribution to the GDP. Forest products, minerals and energy, and livestock grazing also played an important role. In fiscal year 2021, the national forests generated 2.9 billion board feet of timber - enough timber to build about 180,000 new single-family homes. Together, various kinds of resource extraction accounted for about a quarter of the jobs and 27 percent of the contribution to GDP. Forest products alone supported more than 42,000 jobs and contributed more than \$3.7 billion to GDP.

The main way that many Americans use and enjoy their national forests and grasslands today is for outdoor recreation. We have 370,000 miles of road to give people access to their favorite spots. Our visitors have 159,000 miles of trail they can use across landscapes of all kinds. They can use 220,000 miles of stream across the National Forest System, and those are the favorite spots by far; most outdoor recreation occurs within half a mile of a stream. In 2020, we had 168 million visitors. People come to use and enjoy the national forests and grasslands together with family and friends, with benefits that include physical exercise and all the mental and other health benefits that come with it. For local communities, this is where they live, work, and play. Outdoor activities and scenery give them a sense of identity and place, adding to their quality of life.

All this is now at risk on forests and grasslands nationwide. Many ecosystems nationwide are degrading and losing habitat for our native plants and wildlife. Climate change is altering

environmental conditions nationwide. Drought has contributed to outbreaks of insects and disease that have killed tens of millions of acres of forest across the West. Changing environmental conditions have lengthened fire seasons into fire years and worsened wildfires across the West. At the same time our forests are becoming more overgrown and unhealthy. Expanding development into the wildland urban interface puts more homes into fire-prone landscapes. One American home in three is now in the wildland/urban interface, increasing wildfire risk to these communities, because 80-90 percent of all wildfires are human-caused.

The growing wildfire risk is due to accumulating fuels, a warming climate, and expanding development in the wildland/urban interface. But we know what to do based on decades of science and experience. To protect communities and natural resources, we need to restore healthy, resilient fire-adapted forests.

For decades, we have been putting fuels and forest health treatments into place, but it has been a challenge to coordinate funding and capacity across landownership boundaries at the needed scale. We have tended to place our treatments where we can rather than where we should. The result is that the scale of our work on the ground has not matched the place and scale of highest risk; therefore, the risk has continued to grow.

In the right places at the right scale, our science-based thinning and burning treatments work to protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources while helping wildland firefighters respond to wildfires safely and effectively. We now have the science and tools we need to size and place treatments in a way that will truly make a difference for confronting the wildfire crisis. Science tells us that less than 10 percent of the fire-prone areas in the West are responsible for 80 percent of the exposure. That is where our focus will be: on the landscapes where the risk to lives, homes, communities, and natural resources is greatest.

The Forest Service cannot succeed in this alone. The wildfire crisis facing the nation confronts us across ownerships. This is not just about the National Forest System. The highest risk firesheds are typically in multiple ownerships, with wildfire ignitions potentially coming from multiple directions across boundary lines. Fortunately, we have decades of experience working through partnerships and collaboration based on common values and shared goals across shared landscapes.

Delivering water, wood, wildlife, and all the other values and benefits that our citizens want and need from the Nation's forests and grasslands depends on success in confronting the wildfire crisis through sustained investments over multiple years. It also depends on the hard work of motivated employees who feel valued, safe, and respected in a workplace free of harassment that reflects the diversity of the people we serve. Understanding the challenges many people have faced particularly during the pandemic, we have redesigned services to maintain the mental health and resilience of

our employees, particularly our wildland firefighters. We are working across government to enhance the work experiences of firefighters and to provide the pay and benefits they deserve.

The investments highlighted below reflect services the Forest Service delivers through our National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, and Research and Development mission areas. These investments enable the Forest Service, together with our partners, to restore the long-term forest health and resiliency across landscapes the American people cherish. The citizens we serve deserve nothing less.

Highlights From the President's FY 2023 Budget Request for Specific Priorities

Each of the requested investments detailed below showcase the agency's priorities:

- \$321 million for hazardous fuels reduction, which will allow the agency to mitigate wildfire risk on 3.8 million acres in high priority and high-risk areas. This investment builds on the hazardous fuels funding the Forest Service will receive through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2023 and supports the objectives of the agency's 10-year wildfire crisis strategy.
- \$1.15 billion for Wildland Fire Management Salaries and Expenses to fund additional firefighters and firefighting support personnel and support this Administration's direction that all firefighters receive a minimum wage of \$15 per hour. This increased workforce capacity will enhance year-round fire response and hazardous fuels reduction activity and allow the Forest Service to continue important investments that support the health, well-being, and resilience of the agency's wildland firefighting force.
- \$1.68 billion for National Forest System Salaries and Expenses. Funding will strengthen areas needed to support the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the agency's 10-year wildfire crisis strategy, and the Great American Outdoors Act. This funding will also help the agency bolster capacity in critical non-fire programs, which have lost staffing in recent years, and thereby enhance social and economic benefits to the American public.
- \$110 million for Recreation, Heritage and Wilderness to increase capacity for critical recreation operations, planning, services, and improvements, with particular emphasis on creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans with a focus towards underserved and Tribal communities.
- \$98 million for Vegetation and Watershed Management to support healthy and resilient watersheds and landscapes, sustain the production of clean and abundant air and water, assist with meeting the Administration's climate goals, support post-fire restoration work, and contribute to healthy and productive rural communities and Tribal Nations.
- \$45 million for Minerals and Geology Management, which will support efforts to locate and prioritize orphaned oil and gas wells for remediation and the inventory, environmental analysis, and clean-up of mine reclamation sites.

- \$26 million for Grazing Management to support post-fire restoration, provide for strategic incentives to grazing permittees, and build vibrant rural economies.
- \$59 million for Forest Health Management to ensure healthy forests and functional landscapes and to address the effects of climate change on public lands in support of the conservation priorities of the Administration.

The FY 2023 Budget request also builds on the approach to climate change articulated in the FY 2022 Budget and leverages the historic investments enacted in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to implement the Administration’s climate agenda. The request supports the expansion of the scope and scale of research and science delivery related to reforestation, carbon sequestration, carbon accounting, mitigating forest pests, and post-fire restoration, and invests \$6 million to support the USDA Climate Hubs in FY 2023.

Through Great American Outdoors Act (GAOA) (P.L. 116-152) funding, the Forest Service continues to repair and upgrade vital infrastructure and facilities in the national forests and grasslands through the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. GAOA also permanently funds the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), investing in conservation and recreation opportunities in public and private lands through the Forest Legacy Program and Federal Land Acquisition.

According to the agency’s 2020 economic analysis, Forest Service GAOA projects are projected to support approximately 4,400 jobs and contribute \$420 million to the Gross Domestic Product on an average annual basis over the 5-year authorization of the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. In FY 2023, the Forest Service proposes \$94.3 million for the Forest Legacy Program, \$123.9 million for Federal Land Acquisition, and \$285 million for the National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund. The FY 2023 project lists are included in the FY 2023 Budget request.

Legislative Proposals and Administrative/General Provisions

The FY 2023 President’s Budget proposes several key legislative changes to improve our effectiveness in delivering programs and services:

- *Interest Bearing Account*: This legislative proposal would allow the Forest Service to establish an interest-bearing Treasury account for funds received in settlements and other legal actions. This proposal is based on a USDA Office of Inspector General audit recommendation.
- An addition to the Administrative Provisions that would provide *authority to Job Corps staffs to continue to effectively operate in the new budget structure*. The Enterprise Program,

Geospatial Technology and Applications Center, remnant Natural Resource Managers, and National Technology and Development Program are already covered under this provision.

- A new General Provision that would provide *legislative relief from the Forest Resources Conservation and Shortage Relief Act of 1997*. This proposal is in response to a Government Accountability Office audit on timber exports.
- The Budget also requests one-year extensions of the following authorities: Mining Applications; Contract Support Costs; Forest Botanical Products; Grazing Permits; Puerto Rico Schooling; Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act Reauthorization; Forest Service Facility Realignment and Enhancement Authorization; Shasta-Trinity Marina Fee; Interpretive Association Authority; Forest Botanical Products; Forest Ecosystem Health and Recovery Fund; and Local Contractors.

The Forest Service is committed to the values of equity, inclusion, and equal opportunities for its employees and the public it serves. We are actively recognizing opportunities within the agency that ensure historically underserved groups, including Tribes, more fully access and participate in Forest Service programs and services. We are also embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace and ensuring a safe, resilient, and harassment-free work culture where employees are treated with respect and dignity. The Forest Service has taken significant steps to improve policies, raise accountability, upgrade reporting systems, and conduct ongoing training focused on workplace environment to stop harassment, bullying, and retaliation. We are also creating welcoming, sustainable, and equitable recreation opportunities for all Americans. This work is essential and will continue in FY 2023.

In closing, the President's FY 2023 Budget request for the Forest Service prioritizes investments to improve the resilience of landscapes and watersheds across boundaries and reduce wildfire risk by treating the right acres at the right scale; and by restoring infrastructure, supporting outdoor recreation, investing in reforestation of impacted landscapes, and removing barriers to access. We look forward to working with this Subcommittee to fulfill the President's goals and our key responsibilities for the long-term benefit of the Nation's forests and grasslands, and for all Americans. I will be glad to answer your questions.