

**Testimony of Tom Martin, President, American Forest Foundation
For the House Appropriations Committee:
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and related Agencies
March 22, 2012**

Investments in the US Forest Service Forest Stewardship Program and the US Forest Service Forest Health Program on Cooperative Lands will help family forest owners get ahead of increasing threats from invasive pests and pathogens, wildfire, and development pressures. It is also critical that funding for US Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis Program and overall Forest Service Research and Development is maintained, so these programs continue to provide the information and technical resources for landowners to make informed decisions about our forests. Investments in forestry programs will help strengthen rural communities, support rural jobs, and ensure that communities that rely on the clean water and air, wildlife habitat, and forest products from these forests, don't face additional costs for these services. Additionally, we urge continued support for the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Education, which invests in the future—our children—ensuring the next generation is well-prepared to manage our nation's natural resources.

Family forest owners are facing a "perfect storm" of threats. Wildfires, invasive species and other insects and diseases, pressures from development, shrinking forest products markets, and ownership changes make it harder than ever to keep America's forests healthy and productive. It is therefore essential we ensure these families have tools, technical information, and policy support to keep their forests as forests, for current and future generations.

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) urges the Subcommittee to maintain FY 2012 funding for programs that support good forest stewardship on our nation's 251 million acres of family-owned forests and ensure the next generation is equipped to conserve and manage these forests – for the benefit of all Americans.

Given the tight budget climate, we understand tough decisions must be made. However, we urge you to consider maintaining funding for the previously mentioned programs as a high priority, given the impact these programs have on rural families and communities, forest conservation and the future of our country's forest resources.

The American Forest Foundation is a nonprofit conservation organization that works on the ground through a variety of programs including the American Tree Farm System®, representing 83,000 Tree Farmers who sustainably manage more than 26 million acres under rigorous standards. Our mission is to help these families be good stewards and keep their forests healthy for future generations. Because we know that conserving our forests also means enabling the next generation to manage and care for them, AFF is also home to the largest environmental education program, Project Learning Tree® (PLT). Our network of coordinators in all 50 states helps train more than 30,000 teachers each year in peer-reviewed curricula, correlated to state standards. Since its inception, PLT has reached 75 million students, helping them learn how to think, not what to think, about complex environmental and natural resources issues.

Families and individuals steward more of America's forests than the federal government or corporations. Families and individuals own 35 percent of our nation's forests.¹ These private forests provide myriad public benefits—clean air, clean water, recreation, renewable resources that build our homes and communities, and good-paying rural jobs. Family forest owners invest their own time, resources, and energy into keeping their forests healthy and ensuring their children and grandchildren have the same opportunities. Sometimes families can do this on their own, but in many cases, these families need help, both technically and financially. In addition to the private, consulting forester workforce, every state has a network of reliable and trusted service foresters that help family forest owners make good forest management decisions. These boots-on-the-ground make all the difference.

Take Steve and Janet Funk, for example. Steve and Janet are our 2011 National Outstanding Tree Farmers of the Year from Subcommittee Chairman Simpson's home-state of Idaho. When the couple first purchased their Tree Farm in the early 1970's, it was in a state of total disrepair. The stream banks were heavily eroded and the forested hillsides were overstocked and severely neglected. Knowing he needed professional guidance, Steve looked toward his state forestry agency, the Idaho Department of Lands, and local extension programs. Steve proceeded to work with these professionals to complete his first Forest Stewardship management plan, with the goal of restoring water quality, wildlife habitat, and the health and productivity of his forest.

State service foresters were always available to help the Funks after a harvest, determine what species were best to plant, and determine the best management tactics for maximum productivity. Resources from the Forest Stewardship Program were instrumental in bringing the Funk's Tree Farm back to life.

With the proposed cuts to the Forest Stewardship Program, fewer family forest owners will have access to state service foresters who help millions of America's forest owners keep America's private forests healthy. These foresters provide valuable technical advice as well as help forest owners write management plans to guide the future management of their land. We simply cannot have healthy forests without foresters.

Steve and Janet Funk are just two forest landowners from a collection of more than 1,200 forest owners across the country who, in the last four weeks, signed a letter calling on Congress to maintain support for the Forest Stewardship Program. These folks can't imagine how they would continue sustainably managing our nation's forests without the assistance of our network of state foresters.

In addition to active landowners like the Funks, there is a large portion of family forest owners, estimates suggest close to 95 percent, that aren't actively engaged in the management of their

¹ USDA, May 2008, *Who Owns America's Forests?*

lands.² We know from the latest trends in forest health and wildfire, that leaving nature to take its course is no longer a viable option. We must find ways to engage these landowners in active management of their woodlands. The Forest Stewardship Program provides support for state agencies to reach these landowners and help them engage in management that will improve the health of their land.

Proper forest management is critical to ensuring the long-term sustainability of our nation's forests. Every day forests across the country face threats from invasive pests and pathogens. 58 million acres of forests are at risk of being overtaken by insects, disease, and other invasive species, threatening to change the existing structure of our forest ecosystems. The implications of this forest loss on our nation's clean water supply, wildlife habitat, recreation, renewable energy supply, and rural communities would be devastating.

Pulling examples from some of the Subcommittee members' states—Last year, the Asian-longhorned beetle, which threatens 15 tree species from maples to birches, was found, for the first time, in southern Ohio.³ In California and Arizona, the goldspotted oak borer has already killed more than 80,000 live oak and black oak trees in less than 15 years.⁴ And in Minnesota, forest owners are gearing up for what would be a devastating attack of thousand cankers disease on their black walnut trees. These are just a few in a long list of invasive threats our forest owners face.

Efforts such as the US Forest Service Forest Health Program, help landowners better understand the threats they face and the management techniques which mitigate harm. In the case of the emerald ash borer, the Forest Health Program created an integrated program strategy, dedicated to reducing the adverse impacts of this pest on Northeastern area forests. Similar efforts for other threats are a main focus of these programs, ensuring our nation's forest landowners are equipped with the best knowledge to make the most informed management decisions.

US Forest Service Forest Health Programs are critical tools in identifying, mitigating and eliminating the impacts of invasive pests and pathogens. Without these programs, our nation's forests, and the livelihoods that depend on them, would be left unprotected.

Both of these programs, the Forest Stewardship Program and the Forest Health Program, must be grounded in sound science and sound forest information. That's where the US Forest Service's Forest Inventory and Analysis Program and the Agency's Research and Development Programs (R&D) come in. These programs provide irreplaceable data about our forests, the health and conditions, and give landowners the tools to know how to manage the growing threats they face. The R&D function is not only essential for providing forest management research, it is also on the leading edge of providing new information about the use of wood

² Brett J. Butler. 2010. *Family Forest Owners of the United States, 2006: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment*

³ USDA Agriculture Research Service. 2011. *Behavior and Biology of the Asian Longhorned Beetle*.

⁴ Center for Invasive Species Research, University of California, Riverside. 2011. *The Goldspotted Oak Borer*.

products through life cycle assessments. With more information about the environmental and economic benefits of using wood products, especially in the growing green building market, decision makers can make informed building material choices. And we believe as the science shows, wood is one of the top materials when it comes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and storing carbon, reducing energy consumption and pollution, and creating jobs. With more decision makers choosing wood, family forest owners have more demand for their products which helps ensure they have the resources to reinvest in keeping their lands healthy. We urge the Subcommittee to support the Forest Stewardship and Forest Health programs and we continue to call on the US Forest Service to invest in life cycle assessment research in particular.

Steve, Janet, and our vast network of Tree Farmers also understand the importance of educating the next generation of Tree Farmers and natural resource managers. The Funks want to ensure that the next generation will take on the challenge of good stewardship and continue to conserve these lands. This is a growing concern, with 170 million acres of family forests expected to change hands in the next few decades as family forest owners increase in age.⁵

Steve and Janet, like so many Tree Farmers, do their part to educate local schoolchildren on the importance of proper forest management. In addition to hosting numerous school tours, every year, they coordinate with their state Project Learning Tree Coordinator to host more than 40 state teachers on their Tree Farm. These educators learn first-hand the many public benefits of healthy forests and the management necessary to protect these forest goods and services—information that then goes back to the classroom, reaching hundreds more schoolchildren.

Programs like the EPA's Office of Environmental Education, authorized by the National Environmental Education Act, or the US Forest Service's Conservation Education Program, help support Project Learning Tree efforts and enable more Tree Farmers, like Steve and Janet, to reach even more kids. Without these program resources, fewer kids would understand the important connection of our country's well-being to the natural world. Educating the next generation is key to conserving and maintaining healthy forests for the long-run, and these education programs make it happen.

To conclude, AFF recognizes the Subcommittee must find areas to reduce spending. We simply ask the Subcommittee to consider the impact these reductions may have on the country's more than 10 million family forest owners and every American who benefits daily from the benefits of well-managed, working forests. We urge the Subcommittee to work to maintain funding levels for the US Forest Service's Forest Stewardship Program, Forest Health Cooperative Lands Program, Forest Inventory and Analysis Program, Research and Development Program, Conservation Education Initiative, and EPA's Office of Environmental Education.

I thank the Subcommittee for giving me the opportunity to provide some insight on these programs and appreciate consideration of my testimony. I am more than happy to answer any questions on these programs and our Tree Farm network.

⁵ Brett J. Butler. 2010. *Family Forest Owners of the United States, 2006: A Technical Document Supporting the Forest Service 2010 RPA Assessment*