Written Testimony
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April 25, 2008

FY 2009 Budget
Senate Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies

Regarding the USDA Forest Service Budget

Executive Summary

The Alliance for Community Trees is a national nonprofit alliance of 150 organizations from 40 states, dedicated to urban forest protection and care. Together Alliance for Community Trees affiliates have planted 7.8 million trees in cities with help from 450,000 volunteers. Alliance for Community Trees urges the Subcommittee to:

1. **Support the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry program.** There is tremendous resource pressure on urban forests, as invasive species, wildfire, and land development impact quality of life in cities and towns. As the population of the country becomes increasingly larger, more urban and more diverse, urban natural resources will play an increasingly important role in the health of people and the livability and function of our cities.

   We recommend that Congress provide a total of $50 million to deliver a successful and expanded Urban and Community Forestry Program to the nation's public, to include the following components:
   - State agency technical and financial assistance that builds community capacity for delivering effective on-the-ground urban forest management and enhancement programs. ($36 million)
   - Enhanced technology transfer and public information, coordinated across Forest Service regional units and research stations. ($2 million)
   - Creation of a Metropolitan Areas Tree Canopy Restoration Initiative that leverages Forest Service resources and expertise from different departments and programs to conduct multi-year, regional scale demonstration projects in 10-15 metropolitan areas. ($12 million)

2. **Double the Forest Service's research investment for urban forests and urban natural resources within its Research and Development units.** In FY 2007, the Forest Service funded roughly $6.2 million in research on urban forests as part of the overall Research & Development budget. We recommend the agency increase its investment in research on urban natural resources issues to reach $24 million by the year 2012. **In FY 2009, we recommend a budget of at least $8 million to further research on the function, value, and benefits of urban forests and to learn how urban forests can be better managed to maximize environmental service benefits.**

Dear Madam Chairwoman:

The Alliance for Community Trees is a national coalition of 150 non-profit organizations from 40 states, dedicated to urban forest protection and care. Across the country, our member organizations work with the public to plant and care for community trees and to cultivate awareness of the essential value of trees for healthy and livable cities. Alliance for Community Trees members have engaged 450,000 people to plant 7.8 million trees in cities nationwide.

We value the leadership, technical resources and financial assistance that the USDA-Forest Service provides the nation through its Urban and Community Forestry Program. Working in partnership with state agencies, grassroots community organizations and local governments, the U&CF Program has leveraged $3 for every $1 of federal support provided.

Urban forests are extremely important to the health of our people and the future of our cities. With leadership from the Forest Service, urban forests can be better managed and utilized to address the following concerns:

- **Public Health:** Access to trees, green spaces, and parks promotes greater physical activity, reduces stress, and reduces asthma risks.
- **Climate:** Trees cool ambient temperatures in cities, reducing emissions. Urban trees sequester 22.8 million tons of carbon per year – a service worth $3.8 billion annually.
- **Energy:** Tree windbreaks reduce residential heating costs 10-15%, while shading and evaporative cooling from trees can cut residential cooling costs 20-50%.
- **Water:** Urban forests are efficient stormwater management systems that can help cities reduce infrastructure and water treatment costs.
- **Air:** Trees produce oxygen, intercept airborne particulates, and reduce smog.
- **Regulatory Compliance:** Increasing tree cover by 10% in New York City would meet over 1/3 of the city's federal air quality compliance needs for ground level ozone.
- **Risk Management:** Professional urban forest management contains threats in the "urban interface"—such as invasive species, exotic pests, and fire—that pose a risk to forestlands.

The Forest Service is the premier forest research institution in the world. The agency plays a unique and very important federal role as a key provider of research about the structure, function, and value of urban forests. In turn, the Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program is the primary conduit for applying and transferring this research knowledge to state agencies, who work with landowners and practitioners that impact the resource at the field level. In recent years, the Forest Service has improved integration and cooperation between S&PF and R&D to produce tangible results for urban forest management. For instance, the agency produced I-TREE and STRATUM, software programs that use research algorithms to analyze the functional benefits that trees provide to a city.

The Value of the State Financial and Technical Assistance Partnership

With assistance from the U&CF Program, State Forest Agencies have made a significant impact on local government programs to better protect and manage urban forest resources. More and

more localities are instituting tree protection ordinances, developing urban forest management plans, hiring professional foresters and arborists to oversee programs, and experiencing increased citizen interest in voluntarily planting and protecting community trees. Nearly 3,000 communities are now "Tree City USA's," a status that recognizes hallmarks of better urban forest management by localities. **To continue this critical technical assistance function, State Forestry Agencies, in partnership with the USDA Forest Service, should be provided $36 million in U&CF program funds in FY 2009.** The growth of cities of all sizes will continue to place growing demands on State Forestry Agencies for this core technical assistance.

The Opportunity for a Metropolitan Areas Tree Canopy Restoration Initiative

In addition, the U&CF Program should be expanded to better address broader, regional-scale issues. Cities like Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Boston recently announced ambitious tree canopy restoration goals with strong executive leadership from their city mayors. Cities are increasingly recognizing the need for swift action to address sustainability and environmental health in their communities, as evidenced by the 800 cities that have signed onto the U.S. Mayors Climate Protection Agreement.

The Forest Service has an important role to play in cities, which are unique "critical landscapes" of their own kind. Urban natural resources should be better used as functioning systems to support public health, social engagement, economic vitality, water quality and air quality.

The Alliance for Community Trees recommends the creation of a multi-year integrated research & technical assistance project that develops a variety of successful frameworks for regional reforestation and forest preservation in cities and their suburban surroundings. The Forest Service should invest $12 million in FY2008 for a Metropolitan Areas Canopy Restoration Initiative to assess, restore, and maintain urban tree canopy in 10 to 15 pilot cities.

The Metropolitan Areas Tree Canopy Restoration Initiative would require multi-year funding commitment and a strong on-the-ground research presence by the Forest Service. It would also offer focused opportunity for partnership with other federal and state agencies, such as EPA, State Air Quality Divisions, and other entities with an aligned interest in urban environmental health. The initiative should devise science-based tree canopy targets, develop restoration goals and strategies to maximize ecological service benefits, and monitor effectiveness of implementation in a geographically varied range of pilot cities. Pilot cities should match and leverage funds to implement restoration through diverse and collaborative public-private partnerships that include government, private and nonprofit partners, and the public. The initiative would encourage multi-jurisdictional and cross-departmental collaboration among local governments to address urban forest goals at a systems level.

Examples for how a regional/metropolitan approach could work are emerging in cities such as Baltimore, Sacramento, and Philadelphia. These cities are creating regional frameworks to engage a wide variety of public agencies, landowners, private sector partners and the public to re-imagine and restore the landscape of the region, with urban forests as a key focus. These cities are also working with Forest Service researchers and academic institutions to monitor and track progress and learn how trees impact the city's ecology, economy, and people.

Possible candidates include the metropolitan areas of Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Seattle, Portland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, Indianapolis, Des Moines, Albuquerque, Denver, Atlanta, Houston, Miami, and others.

The Need for Enhanced Technology Transfer

The Forest Service is a large organization with many regional units and research stations dispersed across the country. This geographic breadth is a tremendous advantage to responding to the unique forest conditions present in every region. It can, however, be a barrier to effective communication that transcends geographic and organizational boundaries. With $2 million in Technology Transfer funds to develop nationally-applicable technology tools, publications, resource materials, and national communication tools, the Forest Service can work with state and NGO partners to narrow the gap between what is known and what is practiced.

A Growing Need for Urban Forest Research

Urban forest research is the most important investment that the federal government makes in support of urban forests. Community organizations, local governments and state agencies have been able to utilize Forest Service research findings to make the case for better policies and practices at the local and state level, improving the health and livability of US cities.

In FY 2007, the Forest Service funded roughly $6.2 million in research on urban forests as part of the overall Research & Development budget. We recommend an investment of $8 million in FY 2009, dedicated to the following key units: Pacific SW Station at Davis, CA; Northern Station at Syracuse, NY; Northern Station at Evanston, IL; Northern Station at Burlington, VT; Southern Station at Gainesville, FL; and Southern Station at Athens, GA.

In addition, we express our special concern that the Pacific SW Station at Davis is particularly underfunded despite its outstanding applied research products.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

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