

**Statement of Deborah Gangloff, Executive Director, AMERICAN FORESTS
To the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee, U.S. House of Representatives
On the President's FY 2008 Budget Proposals
For the USDA Forest Service and USDI Bureau of Land Management
April 19, 2007**

SUMMARY OF REQUESTS

USDA Forest Service

- **Urban and Community Forestry Program at \$50 million.**
- **Economic Action Programs at \$40 million to build local capacity for forest restoration.**
- **Forest Stewardship Program at \$35 million to reach a more private forest landowners.**
- **Hazardous fuels reduction at \$310 million to plan and implement collaborative projects.**
- **State Fire Assistance at \$50 million (WFM) and \$40 million (S&PF) to support local collaboration through Community Wildfire Protection Plans.**
- **Rehabilitation and Restoration at \$10 million to restore areas damaged by wildfire.**

USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

- **Hazardous fuel reduction at \$210 million to plan and implement collaborative projects.**
- **Rural Fire Assistance at \$10 million.**
- **Burned Area Rehabilitation at \$25 million.**

Dear Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Founded in 1875, AMERICAN FORESTS is the oldest national citizen conservation group in the U.S. Our membership includes a diverse mix of scientists, landowners, resource managers, and community activists in urban and rural areas. Our mission is to help people improve the environment with trees and forests. We do this by helping citizens understand and participate in forest conservation policies and programs that affect their communities and the forest ecosystems of which they are a part. Our testimony focuses on Forest Service and BLM programs to pursue the goal of collaborative forest restoration through strategies that build community capacity.

USDA Forest Service—Expanding Collaborative Efforts in an Era of Restoration

As natural resource management has evolved from an era of resource extraction to a new era of forest restoration, one of the primary strategies that the Forest Service has called for is expanding collaboration with other federal agencies, state and local governments, and non-governmental organizations. American Forests has been a strong and consistent proponent of collaborative forest restoration encouraging efforts programs that build understanding and trust among diverse interests, develop collaborative plans and projects, implement projects in ways that strengthen both agency and community capacity, and monitor results for accountability and adaptive learning. In recent years, we have expressed concern about the Administration's tendency to treat collaboration as if it were simply cost-reduction—letting the private sector or state and local governments take on greater financial responsibility for activities such as assistance to

communities and non-federal forest landowners, community-based planning, and rural development. The Administration's FY 2008 proposals continue this approach to collaboration by cutting many programs, particularly in the State and Private Forestry, which we believe are critical to collaboration.

State and Private Forestry (S&PF)

By definition, S&PF programs are those through which the Forest Service cooperates with other entities, including private for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The Administration proposes to cut Cooperative Forestry programs within S&PF across the board, with the exception of the **Forest Legacy Program**, which provides funds for acquiring easements on private forests threatened by conversion to non-forest uses. American Forests supports the proposed increase for Forest Legacy, which at \$29.3 million is only about half of the program's FY 2006 funding.

Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF): American Forests has played a significant role in the development of the U&CF program since the early 1980s. We continue to feel this program has tremendous potential for connecting people to nature and applying scientific knowledge of forest ecology to the management of urban systems. This potential, however, is far from realized. The agency needs to embark on an innovative approach to urban forestry that addresses head-on the issue of human development and natural systems. It is not enough just to increase the number of trees in urban area, even though that is needed. The growth of populations, development, and economic systems in urban areas is overwhelming the natural systems, which provide critical ecological services, such as regulating stormwater flow, reducing air pollution, and conserving energy. In order to make the necessary changes in the U&CF program, we urge this Subcommittee to restore base funding for this program but also to provide the agency with specific direction to embark on this new approach. As part of this new approach, we propose a model project focusing on the Southeast, a region with major issues related to natural systems and urban development. American Forests would like to work with the Subcommittee, the Forest Service national office, and the agency's Southern Region to develop an action plan for this project, which would cover five states and about a dozen urban centers.

American Forests is concerned about the 38 percent cut in the U&CF program proposed by the Administration. We urge Congress to provide \$50 million for the program, consistent with the recommendations of the Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition. This funding would include \$36 million for the U&CF base program, \$12 million for a Metropolitan Areas Canopy Restoration Initiative focused on assessing, restoring, and maintaining urban tree canopy cover in 10 to 15 pilot cities, and \$2 million for technology transfer and education. In addition, we urge Congress to support \$6 million in the agency's Research budget for urban forestry.

Economic Action Programs (EAP): The EAP has been critical for the agency's transition from output-based resource management to forest restoration. It has particularly helped rural communities work through place-based collaboration to develop innovative restoration projects, train skilled workers, apply appropriate technologies, and build local businesses that can add value to restoration by-products. Once again, the President proposes to eliminate funding for EAP on the basis that it is redundant with other USDA rural development programs. These other

programs, however, do not and can not provide the types of technical and financial assistance that EAP has provided to rural communities. We believe it is essential for Congress to continue funding EAP, or a similar program, that will assist rural communities in building local capacity for forest restoration activities. We urge the Congress to fund EAP at \$40 million.

Forest Stewardship Program: The Administration's proposed 41 percent reduction in the Forest Stewardship Program would have significant impacts on the agency's ability to provide technical assistance to non-industrial private forest landowners at a time when the conservation and stewardship of private forests is emerging as a major policy issue facing our country, due to the important products and environmental services they provide. We urge the Committee to provide \$35 million for this program.

In addition, the Administration proposes a severe 63 percent cut in the **International Forestry** program. We believe it is critical for the agency to maintain sufficient capacity to effectively participate in international issues such as sustainable forestry criteria and indicators, wildfire, forest product trade, and climate change. We urge \$7 million for this program.

Wildland Fire Management (WFM)

Suppression: This is the Administration's top Forest Service priority in FY 2008. The agency's approach to budgeting is based on a 10-year average of suppression costs. With suppression costs exceeding \$1 billion in four of the last seven years, the 10-year average has increased significantly. This year's proposal would increase suppression funding by 23 percent to \$911 million—amounting to more than 20 percent of the agency's \$4.13 billion budget. Such an increase at a time when the agency's overall budget is reduced, significantly affects funding available for other programs. The continuing cuts in other programs are changing the nature and capacity of the agency—shifting it from a resource management agency to a wildfire fighting agency. Congress will soon need to address the issue of how increasing wildfires and related suppression costs are affecting the ability of the Forest Service to meet its overall mission.

Hazardous Fuels Reduction: This program is one of the National Fire Plan priorities; taking proactive steps to reduce wildfire threats to communities. American Forests continues its strong support for this program, urging Congress to provide \$310 million. We are concerned, however, that the Administration's emphasis on efficiency requires the agency to focus on treating the most acres at the least cost, while giving too little attention to higher priority acres for reducing risks to communities. We would also like to see clearer direction for this program to provide greater support for Community Wildfire Protection Plans to identify where and how fuel reduction treatments should be done on the landscape and how these treatments and their by-products may provide opportunities for local businesses and workers.

State Fire Assistance (SFA): The SFA has become a key federal program for providing financial and technical assistance to communities for preparing Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). As authorized under the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003, CWPPs are a key mechanism for local collaboration. The President proposes to cut the SFA (WFM) by more than 20 percent from the FY 2006 level of \$45.8 million. American Forests urges the Congress to

increase funding for this program to \$50 million. In addition, we support an increase in SFA (S&PF) from the Administration's proposal of \$33 million to \$40 million.

Rehabilitation and Restoration: We are concerned about the President's proposal to eliminate funding for this program. Funded by Congress at \$142 million in FY 2001, this program was intended to help achieve critical post-wildfire objectives, such as dealing with invasive species and encouraging reforestation through tree-planting or natural regeneration, as well as serving the larger National Fire Plan goal of restoring fire-adapted ecosystems. Since then, however, the Administration has consistently requested little or no funding for it, despite the fact wildfires have been increasing and have burned millions of National Forest acres. For several years, American Forests has been cooperating with the Forest Service through our Wildfire ReLeaf campaign, raising private-sector matching funds to help plant trees on burned-over lands for environmental restoration purposes. We believe that "keeping forests as forests" should be one of the agency's highest priorities, and that greater funding is needed for the Rehabilitation and Restoration program to better understand and address post-fire restoration concerns. We urge Congress to provide at least \$10 million for this program this year.

National Forest System

The Administration proposes once again to sell lands within the National Forest System to raise funds to support an extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 (Public Law 106-393). Our response, like last year, is that this proposal to sell increasingly valuable long-term assets to pay for short-term, one-time operational costs is short-sighted and irresponsible. We support the reauthorization and funding of the Secure Rural Schools legislation and find the recent proposals in the House and Senate Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bills encouraging.

USDI Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

With our focus on programs pursuing collaborative forest restoration, we support the President's proposal of \$10.7 million for the **Public Domain Forest Management** program. Increased support for this program in recent years has helped the agency rebuild its staff capacity and seek to develop collaborative forest restoration projects with local communities. We also support the Administration's \$9.4 million proposal for the **Challenge Cost Share** program. This program has helped develop innovative and highly leveraged partnership projects focused on land restoration and resource conservation. Within the Oregon and California Grant Lands accounts, we urge the restoration of funding at \$6 million for the **Jobs-in-the-Woods** program.

Under Wildland Fire Management, we urge Congress to increase funding for the **Hazardous Fuel Reduction** program to \$210 million, to help meet the significant need for fuels reduction through local collaboration. We also urge Congress to restore funding of \$10 million to the **Rural Fire Assistance** program, which the Administration has proposed to eliminate. Finally, we support the President's proposal of \$24.6 million for **Burned Area Rehabilitation**.