June 2, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Chair Simpson, Ranking Members Merkley and Pingree, and
Honorable Committee Members:

In towns and cities of all sizes across America, healthy trees and forests represent highly visible
and meaningful infrastructure—lowering the cost of living, creating jobs, growing local economic
opportunities, and supporting healthier, more prosperous communities. Investing in tree-related
programs is key to addressing priorities from both sides of the aisle and advancing flexible and
cost-effective solutions to a wide range of issues impacting communities, businesses, and
families across America.

Below are recommendations for FY 2026 from the non-partisan Sustainable Urban Forests
Coalition (SUFC) and its extended network for maintaining and expanding the benefits of
healthy trees to all communities across America. SUFC unites over 40 groups representing the
multi-billion-dollar tree care industry, the horticulture industry, urban and state forestry
professionals, a wide range of professional associations like arborists, city planners and public
works professionals as well as forest, conservation, water, and wildlife nonprofit organizations.

USDA Forest Service: State, Private, & Tribal Forestry

Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF)

The Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) program at the USDA Forest Service collaborates
with state forestry agencies, nonprofit organizations, and partners that manage and steward our
nation's urban and community forests. The U&CF program is a model for how state and
community-led priorities can be bolstered by federal investments.

The U&CF program quickly and efficiently distributes funds to shovel-ready projects for
improving communities —serving as a valuable partner to states and community organizations
and helping to remove barriers to growing and maintaining healthy tree canopy. The federal
"seed" money provides resources necessary to initiate and stabilize local programs to manage
trees for the optimal return on investment and ensure a consistency of care nationwide.

Every year, U&CF serves nearly 7,500 communities and over 203 million people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, U.S. Territories, and affiliated Pacific Island Nations— helping to maintain and protect approximately 12 billion trees. U&CF is a high-impact program and a smart investment, as federal support is often leveraged 2:1 (or in many cases up to 5:1) by states and partner organizations. For example, the program boasts well over one million volunteer hours each year.

With help from the U&CF program, communities of all shapes and sizes can curb threats to their trees and forests and maintain them as valuable green infrastructure with science-based, active management and proper disaster planning, response, and recovery. The cumulative benefit to the country of improved urban and community forest management serves our national interests and deserves continued and increased federal investment.

We encourage the appropriators to support this highly successful and efficient program through robust funding commensurate with the demonstrated and growing need across communities of all sizes. The Trillion Trees Act recognized the importance of this program by authorizing funding at $50 million. ***To maximize the program's impact and ensure greater access to its benefits, we recommend funding the program at $50 million.***

Forest Health Management: Cooperative Lands

To be most effective, the USDA Forest Service Forest Health Management program must address pests where they are first found, which is almost always in urban or semi-rural forests. Already, an estimated 41% of forest biomass in the lower 48 states is threatened by just 15 established pests. Municipal governments across the U.S. spend an estimated $2 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by non-native pests while 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.

Once established in cities, the non-native insects and pathogens spread to forests in rural and wildland areas, where the full spectrum of forests values is at risk across National Forests and all other ownerships. Three-quarters of whitebark pine trees threatened by white pine blister rust grow within National Forests. Since the 1950s, hemlock woolly adelgid has spread to National Forests from Georgia to West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Michigan. Within 20 years of its detection, the emerald ash borer had spread from Detroit to many National Forests across the Northeast and Midwest. Over an even shorter period, the polyphagous and Kuroshio shothole borers and goldspotted oak borers have entered the Cleveland National Forest. The damage will rise as additional damaging pests continue to be introduced.

By investing in programs that build capacity for local urban forest managers through early detection and rapid response, the risk of widespread canopy loss can be minimized. Furthermore, investments in tree monitoring and maintenance programs will improve tree health, thereby lessening our tree canopy's susceptibility to these insects and diseases, many of which attack unhealthy trees first. These investments in prevention and early detection can save millions of trees and billions of dollars.

We encourage appropriators to invest in prevention and containment through the Forest Health Management: Cooperative Lands program and recommend at least FY 2024 funding levels of $32 million.

USDA Forest Service: Forest and Rangeland Research

Urban and Community Forest Research

There is an urgent need for research funding to establish benchmarks that can be used to scientifically measure the impacts of trees in communities and develop best practices to improve management. Key topics include urban heat reduction, public health improvements, flood mitigation, and extreme weather resilience. For example, arboriculture and urban forestry professionals need to know where and how trees can best be protected, restored, and managed to reduce storm damage, erosion, and sedimentation while moderating extreme heat and flooding events.

Another major research challenge facing the sector 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 proactive tree health monitoring and on Forest Service R&D creating and enhancing tools for pest detection and protective strategies, including chemical and biological controls and breeding trees resistant to pests.

Urban forestry research funding sources are currently limited, resulting in research that is too often stuck in a permanent "pilot study" mode. Dedicated research investment is therefore needed to build evidence and develop strategies to boost the effectiveness of urban and community forest investments and maximize benefits to residents.

We urge appropriators to specifically expand practical and actionable urban and community forest research under the Forest and Rangeland Research Program at the USDA Forest Service and leverage resources and opportunities for collaboration with other federal agencies.

Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)

For nearly a century, the FIA program—informally referred to as "America's Forest Census" — has been recognized as a world leader in national-scale forest inventory data collection and analysis. Foresters, arborists, businesses, state and local governments, and other resource managers rely on the inventory, data, and analysis provided by the program, which make up the backbone of scientific knowledge on the current state of the nation's forests. This critical information is needed to support sound policy and forest management decisions across all land ownerships—including urban and community forests.

The collaborative efforts between SUFC and the USDA Forest Service helped expand the agency's national data-collection program to include urban and community forest data. This unprecedented achievement in nationwide urban and community forestry inventory data collection is now underway in over 40 cities across the US, and a companion Urban National Landowner Survey has been implemented in nine cities. The program has made urban and

community forest inventory data collection more efficient and nationally replicable, while maintaining high data quality standards and comparability to the national forest inventory.

To continue delivering on sector priorities, we request that appropriators support FIA with no less than $39.7 million in program dollars for FY 2026. Additionally, of the amount allocated for Salaries and Expenses (S&E) in Forest and Rangeland Research, we urge you to explicitly direct $63.4 million for the FIA program.

Finally, appropriators should also be aware that ***$3.9 million in Forest Service IT* funding— pooled and allocated across the agency by the Chief Information Office—is needed to deliver the core FIA program.** All three fund sources are used in tandem by the Forest Service in program delivery, and fully operationalizing the core program work of FIA necessitates increased resources across the program, S&E, and IT.

Supporting Organizations

National Organizations (21):
Alliance for Community Trees
American Forests
AmericanHort
American Society of Consulting Arborists
Arbor Day Foundation
Carbon 180
Center for Invasive Species Prevention
City Parks Alliance
Green Infrastructure Center Inc.
GreenLatinos
International Society of Arboriculture
Natural Areas Conservancy
National Association of State Foresters
National Wildlife Federation
Outdoor Power Equipment Institute
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
The Giving Grove
The Student Conservation Association
Tree Care Industry Association
Trust for Public Land
Urban and Community Forestry Society

State, Local, Regional Organizations, & Companies (68):
100K Trees for Humanity (CA)
Alliance for Cape Fear Trees (NC)
Amigos De Los Rios (CA)
Arizona Department of Forestry and Fire Management

Baton Rouge Green (LA)
California Urban Forests Council
Cacapon Institute (WV)
California ReLeaf
Canopy (CA)
Caribbean Regenerative Community Development (Puerto Rico)
Casey Trees (Washington, D.C.)
Central Coast Heritage Oak Tree Foundation (CA)
Chippewa Valley Biodiversity Partnership (WI)
City of Lawrence, Kansas
City of Renton Urban Forestry Program (WA)
City of Williamsport (PA)
CityTrees (CA)
Columbia Green (SC)
Common Vision (CA)
Connecticut Forest & Park Association
Crown Hill Foundation, Crown Hill Arboretum (IN)
Davey Tree Expert Company (Kent, OH)
Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (MI)
Friends of the Riverfront (PA)
Friends of the Urban Forest (CA)
Gotham Park (NY)
Green Columbus (OH)
Holden Forests & Gardens (OH)
Huntington Beach Tree Society (CA)
Hyphae Design Laboratory (CA)
Kate Sessions Commitment (Kate's Trees) in San Diego
Keep It Moving Inc. (MI)
Keep the Midlands Beautiful (SC)
Landforce (PA)
Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust (MA)
Magic (CA)
Maryland Forestry Foundation
Meadowview Urban Tree Project (CA)
Nashville Tree Foundation (TN)
Nehyam Neighborhood Association (CA)
New Jersey Tree Foundation
Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry
Pennsylvania Horticultural Society
PlanIT Geo, Inc.
Project Green: Friends of Pittman Wash (NV)
ReLeaf Michigan Inc.
Roseville Urban Forest Foundation (CA)
Saint Louis Neighborhood Foresters (MO)

Save Lafayette Trees (CA)
SavATree, LLC (NY)
SC Native Plant Society Midlands Chapter
State of Hawaii, Department of Land and Natural Resources, Division of Forestry and Wildlife
Sustainable Claremont (CA)
The Keystone Concept (ID)
10 Million Trees Partnership (PA)
The Morton Arboretum
Tree Fredericksburg (VA)
Tree Fresno (CA)
Tree Lafayette (CA)
Treekeepers of Washington County (OR)
Trees Atlanta (GA)
TreePeople (CA)
TreesLouisville (KY)
TreesUpstate (SC)
Tucson Clean & Beautiful (AZ)
Urban Forest Friends (NJ)
Your Children's Trees (CA)
Wisconsin Arborist Association