



April 20, 2026

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski

Chair, 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 Jeff Merkley

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

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 communities of all sizes across America, healthy trees and forests represent highly visible and meaningful climate resilient 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 2027 that support the Forest Service's commitment to shared stewardship – working across land ownership boundaries to maintain and expand the benefits of healthy trees to all communities – from the non-partisan [Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition](#) (SUFC) and its extended network. 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 associations for professionals like arborists, city planners and public works employees – 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. The U&CF program, sustaining the capacity built by recent investments, 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. The program boasts well over one million volunteer hours each year.

With support from the U&CF program, communities of all shapes and sizes 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.

In addition to lowering costs, U&CF supports a growing workforce – from planting and maintenance to arboriculture, pest management, and urban wood utilization – creating durable, local jobs and building long-term community capacity.

We encourage 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, at a minimum, given the widening gap between authorized levels and enacted funding.

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, these non-native insects and pathogens spread through the Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) into rural forests, increasing hazardous fuel loads and putting the full spectrum of forest values at risk across National Forests and all other ownerships. There

are multiple examples of pests from urban centers spreading to National Forests including whitebark pine trees threatened by white pine blister rust, hemlock woolly adelgid, the emerald ash borer and the polyphagous and Kuroshio shothole borers and goldspotted oak borers. 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 science-based prevention – including host-resistance breeding or biocontrols, as well as containment through the Forest Health Management: Cooperative Lands program and recommend at a minimum, funding levels of \$42 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 2027. 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, we urge the Committee to ensure that Forest Service Information Technology (IT) policies align with the agency's goal of organizational efficiency and support rather than hinder program delivery. The recent funding lapse of the i-Tree tools due to IT policy shifts demonstrates the fragile nature of these digital resources. To avoid similar disruptions to the FIA program, we request that the \$3.9 million in Forest Service IT funding be explicitly protected and directed toward the cloud-based infrastructure and digital toolbox required for the 'America's Forest Census.' IT funding must be treated as a core component of program success, not a barrier to it.

Supporting Organizations

National Organizations (14):

American Forests

American Planning Association

American Society of Landscape Architects

Arbor Day Foundation

Center for Invasive Species Prevention

Green Infrastructure Center, Inc.

National Wildlife Federation

Natural Areas Conservancy

Society of American Foresters

Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Student Conservation Association

The Giving Grove

Unified Wood Economy

Urban and Community Forestry Society

State, Local, Regional Organizations, & Companies (54):

California (19)

- Aesculus Arboricultural Consulting (Mountain View)
- Arbor Expertise (Orange County)
- California Urban Forest Council
- Canopy (Palo Alto)
- Central Coast Regional Urban Forests Council
- Friends of the Urban Forest (San Francisco)
- Greenhill North America, Inc. (San Francisco)
- Inland Urban Forest Council
- Kate Sessions Commitment (Kate's Trees) (San Diego)
- Los Angeles/Orange County Regional Urban Forests Council
- Michelia Arboriculture, LLC (San Francisco)
- Rosewood West (Santa Barbara/Ventura)
- Sacramento Valley Regional Urban Forests Council
- San Diego Regional Urban Forests Council
- San Joaquin Valley Regional Urban Forests Council
- Urban Canopy Collaborative (SF Bay Area Regional Urban Forests Council)
- Wild Rye Consulting LLC (Sacramento)
- Woodreeve Consulting (Oakland)
- Your Children's Trees (Goleta)

Colorado (2)

- PLAY Boulder Foundation (Boulder)
- Trees Please (Pueblo)

Connecticut (5)

- City of Darien
- CT Advocates for Trees
- Hamden Alliance for Trees
- MAD for Trees (Madison)
- Milford Land Conservation Trust Inc.

District of Columbia (1)

- Casey Trees

Georgia (1)

- Savannah Tree Foundation

Hawaii (2)

- Friends of Hawaii's Urban Forest
- Trees for Honolulu

Illinois (3)

- Harvey Neighborhood Network (Harvey)
- Openlands (Chicago)
- The Morton Arboretum (Chicago)

Kentucky (2)

- Trees Lexington
- TreesLouisville

Maryland (1)

- Maryland Forestry Foundation

Massachusetts (2)

- Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust
- Tree Boston

Michigan (3)

- Friends of Grand Rapids Parks (Grand Rapids)
- Urban Ashes (Grand Rapids)
- Women's Innovative Social Enterprise Partnership dba W.I.S.E. Partnership (Detroit)

Minnesota (1)

- MN Shade Tree Advisory Committee

Missouri (1)

- Bridging the Gap (Kansas City)

New Jersey (1)

- Hackensack Shade Tree Advisory Committee

New Mexico (1)

- Abbott Botanical Assessments, LLC (Santa Fe)

Ohio (1)

- The Davey Tree Expert Company (Kent)

Puerto Rico (1)

- Caribbean Regenerative Community Development

Texas (2)

- GROW North Texas
- TreeFolks (Austin)

Vermont (1)

- Timber Tender (Woodstock)

Virginia (2)

- Fairfax County Park Authority (Fairfax)
- Wolf Josey Landscape Architects (Charlottesville)

Washington (2)

- Land Meets Water LLC
- Tacoma Tree Foundation