

April 27, 2023

The Honorable Jeff Merkley  
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Ranking Member, Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and  
Related Agencies  
US Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

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

Dear Chairs Merkley and Simpson, and Ranking Members Murkowski and Pingree:

The undersigned organizations are strong supporters of the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program funded by the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service). We 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 and is increasingly important for decisions regarding forest carbon, sustainability, and existing and expanding markets.

We thank you for the additional \$10 million in FIA programmatic funding provided in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 and look forward to working with you to further improve FIA's capabilities in FY24. The FY23 funding increase will enable the Forest Service to deliver on many of our priorities, including funding states and cooperators that help deliver the program at the current costs of doing business, fully funding plot collection in interior Alaska, bolstering Timber Products Output (TPO) data collection, expanding analysis of forest carbon, growing remote sensing partnerships with NASA, and developing new partnerships in urban forest inventory.

**We urge Congress to continue to support FIA with no less than \$32.2 million in program dollars for FY24. Additionally, of the amount allocated for Salaries and Expenses (S&E) in Forest and Rangeland Research, we urge Congress to direct \$54.9 million for the FIA program.** Fully operationalizing significant program expansion as envisioned in the FY23 omnibus necessitates both programmatic and S&E increases. These two pots of money are used in tandem by the Forest Service in program delivery. **Unfortunately, since USFS budget modernization in FY21, Congress has lost the ability to directly prescribe how much S&E funding is devoted to FIA. We respectfully ask that Congress reinstate that authority in its**

**FY24 appropriations bill.** By explicitly outlining the amount directed toward FIA program S&E, Congress can help improve transparency for all stakeholders.

Programmatic funding increases with commensurate increases to S&E are critical to fully delivering on Congressional priorities outlined in the FIA Strategic Plan.<sup>1</sup> This plan includes improved carbon and biomass estimates, enhanced timber products monitoring, enhanced landowner studies, research into land cover and land use change, and urban forest inventory. All these items add immense value to the understanding of our nation's forests but are not possible at current funding levels and are critical given the increasing demand for FIA data.

Additionally, budget modernization has made it difficult for external stakeholders to determine what budget resources FIA devotes to its various programmatic areas and what budget resources are necessary for FIA to meet its mission. **To further improve transparency, we urge Congress to direct FIA to annually publish its programmatic cost elements and prioritization in its annual budget justification and business report.** Concrete budget figures will enable FIA's stakeholders to better and more consistently advocate before Congress and the Administration and ensure adequate funding and support is provided.

Looking forward, we would like to draw attention to the growing importance of moving to a nationwide five-year data collection cycle. Currently, funding allows the eastern United States to be measured every seven years, while the west is on a ten-year remeasurement cycle. In light of increasing frequency and severity of forest disturbances such as wildfires and hurricanes, the current cycles are inadequate to capture our rapidly changing forest landscapes. They also mean that the U.S. Government's biannual reports to the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) must draw on data that is in some cases a decade old.

In addition to more accurate information regarding forest carbon, there is also a need to make FIA data more robust and useful for other emerging uses, such as forest sustainability monitoring, wildlife habitat assessments, and much more. Furthermore, additional opportunities exist to direct investments in tools to quantify carbon sequestration in forests, forest soils and long-lived forest products. This should include additional investments in the Timber Products Output survey and in new technologies that enhance the core FIA data collection program.

Given the increasing pressures facing our forests—climate impacts, wildfire, insects and disease, and development—the FIA program is more important now than ever before. We look forward to working with Congress and the Forest Service to continue sustainably growing this program and ensuring accurate and timely inventory of America's forests.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fia.fs.usda.gov/library/bus-org-documents/docs/strategic-plan-docs/FIA%20Strategic%20Plan%20FS-1079.pdf>

## Supporting Organizations

Alabama Forestry Association	L&C Carbon
American Forest & Paper Association	Lone Rock Resources
American Forest Foundation	Maryland Forestry Foundation
American Forests	Massachusetts Forest Alliance
American Wood Council	Merrill & Ring
Arkansas Forestry Association	Minnesota Forest Industries
Arkansas Timber Producers Association	Mississippi Forestry Association
Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho	National Alliance of Forest Owners
Association of Consulting Foresters	National Association of Conservation Districts
California Forestry Association	National Association of Forest Service Retirees
California Urban Forests Council	National Association of State Foresters
Cleaves Consulting LLC	National Association of University Forest Resource Programs
Ecological Society of America	National Wildlife Federation
Environmental Defense Fund	National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
Florida Forestry Association	National Woodland Owners Assn.
Forest Landowners Association	North Carolina Forestry Association
Forest Resources Association	Oregon Women In Timber
Forest Stewardship Council US	Outdoor Power Equipment Institute
Forestry Association of South Carolina	Port Blakely
Georgia Forestry Association	Rayonier
Green Diamond Resource Company	Resource Management Service, LLC.
Idaho Forest Group	SC Timber Producers Association
Illinois Forestry Development Council	Society of American Foresters
Kentucky Association of Conservation Districts	
Kentucky Forest Industries Association	

Starker Forests Inc.

Sustainable Forestry Initiative

Tennessee Forestry Association

Texas Forestry Association

The Davey Tree Expert Company

The Hardwood Federation

The Nature Conservancy

The Pennsylvania Forestry Association

The Wilderness Society

Treated Wood Council

University of Kentucky, Department of  
Forestry and Natural Resources

Virginia Forestry Association

Washington Forest Protection Association

West Virginia Forestry Association