

March 14, 2024

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, forest health, and existing and expanding markets.

We thank you for sustaining FIA programmatic funding in both committees' Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 mark-ups and look forward to working with you to further improve FIA's capabilities in FY25. Sustaining this funding increase first provided in FY23 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 FY25. Additionally, of the amount allocated for Salaries and Expenses (S&E) in Forest and Rangeland Research, we urge Congress to explicitly direct \$54.9 million for the FIA program. Fully operationalizing significant program expansion necessitates both programmatic and S&E increases. These two pots of money are used in tandem by the Forest Service in program delivery. **We request that in FY25 you work with the Forest Service to establish a BLI for FIA that includes explicit funding levels for both program dollars and salaries & expenses.** 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.¹ 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 both inside and outside government. Multiple demands to provide critical support to various efforts around climate data and carbon inventory analyses continue to be placed on the FIA program by other federal agencies.

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.

¹ <https://www.fs.usda.gov/research/understory/forest-inventory-and-analysis-strategic-plan>

Requested Budget Language

FOREST AND RANGELAND RESEARCH

Forest Inventory and Analysis.— The bill provides \$32,197,000 for base research activities and \$54,900,000 for salaries and expenses for the Forest Inventory and Analysis [FIA] program.

The committee supports the FIA program, the authoritative data source for forests and forest carbon data, which provides comprehensive data collection, analysis and reporting on forest conditions, including urban and community forest environments, across all forestlands for use by all forest stakeholders. In order to understand the resource needs of the FIA program more transparently, the committee directs FIA to annually publish its programmatic cost elements and prioritization in its annual budget justification and business report.

Supporting Organizations (65 as of 3/14/24)

Alabama Forestry Association
Alaska Forest Association
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Wood Council
Arbor Day Foundation
Arkansas Center for Forest Business
Arkansas Farm Bureau
Arkansas Forestry Association
Arkansas Timber Producers Association
Associated Logging Contractors - Idaho
Association of Consulting Foresters of America
California Forestry Association
Eastern Shore Forest Products
Ecological Society of America
Empire State Forest Products Association
Environmental Defense Fund
Florida Forestry Association
Forest Resources Association
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Green Diamond Resource Company
Idaho Forest Owners Association, Inc.
Illinois Forestry Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association
L&C Carbon
Lone Rock Resources
Louisiana Forestry Association
Louisiana Society of American Foresters
Maryland Forestry Foundation
Maryland Forests Association
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
Minnesota Forest Industries
Mississippi Forestry Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
National Woodland Owners Assn.
New York State Urban Forestry Council
North Carolina Forestry Association
Northeast-Midwest State Foresters Alliance
Ohio Forestry Association
Open Space Institute
Oregon Women In Timber
Port Blakely
Rayonier
Resource Management Service, LLC
SC Timber Producers Association
Society of American Foresters
Southeastern Wood Producers Association, Inc.
Starker Forests, Inc.
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
The American Forest and Paper Association
The Hardwood Federation
The Lyme Timber Company
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Treated Wood Council
University of Arkansas at Monticello
Urban and Community Forestry Society
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
West Virginia Forestry Association