

**Written Public Testimony from Members of the Coalition Against Forest Pests
Signatories:**

Subcommittee to the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Testimony Pertaining to the USDA Forest Service FY21 Budget

Submitted by Faith Campbell, Center for Invasive Species Prevention

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The **Coalition Against Forest Pests** (CAFP) consists of non-profit organizations, for-profit entities, landowners, state agency associations and academic scholars who have joined together to improve our nation's efforts to address forest health threats.

We thank you for your continued support of USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry programs in the FY20 Appropriations bill. We write to ask your support for adequate funding of programs managed by the USDA Forest Service that help keep the nation's forests healthy by preventing introduction and spread of invasive pests. Specifically, we ask the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies to maintain Fiscal Year (FY)2020 funding levels in FY21 and increase funding for specific programs with a long and effective history of detecting and eradicating non-native forest pests.

Forested landscapes cover approximately one-third of the land area of the United States. All forests benefit Americans. Whether rural or urban; federal, state or privately held forests they provide wood products, jobs for rural economies, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, clean water and air, and aesthetic enjoyment.

Forest Health and Management Programs on Cooperative Lands

Maintaining or increasing funding for forest health management on cooperative lands is essential to ensuring the health and productivity of the nation's forests, over 60 percent of which are state or privately owned. Forest-based rural economies and the thousands of jobs they support are also tied to healthy forests, not only in the forest products sector but for recreation industries as well. The economic well-being of tens of thousands of American families depends on healthy forests.

Funding to combat the most damaging non-native insects and pathogens has decreased about 50% over the past decade – at the same time that non-native pests have increased in number, geographic ranges, and impact. Indeed, an estimated 41% of forest biomass in the “lower 48” states is at risk to the 15 species causing the greatest damage. Pest species suffering the largest cuts in recent budgets are the combination of gold spotted oak borer, thousand cankers disease, and laurel wilt; Port-Orford cedar root disease, and threats to whitebark pines. In FY2019, FHP

provided \$125,000 to evaluate the probable impact of laurel wilt disease on sassafras, an important understory tree that grows through most of the eastern deciduous forest.

Unfortunately, the Administration proposes to eliminate programs for these pests in Fiscal Year 2021. This proposal does not reflect recommendations of the CAPTURE project, which called for enhanced conservation efforts specifically targeting laurel wilt, Port-Orford cedar, and whitebark pines.

Funding to counter sudden oak death, which has killed an estimated 50 million trees from southern Oregon to central California, has already been cut by 52% since FY2018; the Administration proposes to cut it by another 15%. This sharp reduction does not recognize the continued spread of the disease and the risk presented by the establishment of a second genetic strain of the pathogen in the Oregon forest.

A new disease killing beech trees – beech leaf disease – is now known to be present in Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and Connecticut; more widespread outbreaks appear likely. USFS Forest Health Protection has provided \$116,000 to support efforts to detect and understand this new and puzzling disease.

There is a continuing crisis in Hawai`i. The most widespread tree, ‘ōhi‘a lehua – which makes up 80% of native forests, and is culturally important to the indigenous peoples of the islands – is threatened severely by the introduced “rapid ‘ōhi‘a death” fungi. FHP has funded monitoring to determine where a second pest, an insect, threatens naio, a tree of the Islands’ dry forests.

The Cooperative Forest Health Management program supports activities related to prevention, monitoring, suppression, and eradication of insects, diseases, and plants through technical and financial assistance to state forestry agencies who deal directly with private forest owners. Because forest pests and disease know no bounds, controlling pests on private lands can stop millions of dollars in damage to public lands and vice versa.

The CAFP members listed at the end of this letter support funding the Forest Health Management on Cooperative Lands Program at \$51 million and on National Forests at \$59 million for FY21.

USDA Forest Service Forest and Rangeland Research Program

Effective programs to prevent, suppress, and eradicate non-native insects, diseases, and plants depend on understanding of the pest-host relationship gained through research.

The Service’s ability to carry out vitally important research on non-native insects, diseases, and plants has already been severely reduced by cuts in previous years. Funding for research conducted by the Research stations on ten non-native pests has decreased from \$10 million in Fiscal Year 2010 to just \$2.5 million in Fiscal Year 2020 – more than 70%. Fortunately, although the Administration’s budget proposes to cut USFS R&D overall by 25%, it does not propose further cuts for these particular species. However, the program is already crippled by the severe cuts of earlier years. They have crippled the Service’s ability to develop effective

tools to manage the growing number of pests threatening the health of the Nation's forests across all ownerships.

We are very concerned by the Administration's proposal to close the Pacific Southwest Research station. This station houses the Service's crucially important expertise on sudden oak death and rapid 'ōhi'a death fungi. As we have noted above, these pathogens are already causing widespread and severe damage to forests in the region. There is a vital need to better understand the possible impacts of a second, apparently more aggressive, genetic strain of the SOD pathogen.

Furthermore, scientific studies have discovered perhaps 50 species of microbes related to the SOD pathogen in the forests of Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia. It is essential that researchers undertake studies to determine which of these newly detected species might cause significant damage to America's trees. The USFS Research and Development program should lead this effort.

Also, the Pacific Southwest station leads research efforts to counter the rapid 'ōhi'a death fungi and other threats to Hawai'i's unique forests.

The USFS Research and Development program is also leading efforts to understand the epidemiology and probable impacts of the recently detected beech leaf disease in the Northeast.

The CAFP members listed at the end of this letter support funding the Forest and Rangeland Research Program in FY21 at \$305 million, of which \$32 million should be allocated to invasive species research.

USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forests Program

Urban and community forests play a critical role in the health of our cities and the health our cities' residents. These forests and tree canopies provide noise abatement, temperature reductions, runoff filtration and flood control as well as improving the quality of life for those living in and around these green areas.

When non-native insects and diseases attack trees and forests, enormous losses may arise. Most of the quantified costs are in cities and suburbs; across the country each year, municipal governments spend more than \$2 billion per year to remove trees on city property that are killed by non-native pests. Homeowners spend \$1 billion every year to remove and replace trees on their properties and absorb an additional \$1.5 billion in reduced property values. As new pests are introduced, and established pests spread, these costs will only continue to rise.

A considerable number of non-native invasive pests and diseases are introduced through cities. As noted above, these pests cost people living in these cities and suburbs – directly or through their local taxes – billions of dollars per year to remove and replace trees killed by the non-native pests. As new pests are introduced, and established pests spread, these costs will only

continue to rise. For example, the polyphagous and Kuroshio shot hole borers are projected to cost municipalities and homeowners in California \$36.2 billion if spread is not prevented.

The CAFP members listed at the end of this letter support funding the Urban and Community Forests Program at a level at least \$35 million for FY21

Members of the Coalition Against Forest Pests supporting this letter:

- American Forest Foundation
- American Forests
- California Forest Pest Council
- Center for Invasive Species Prevention
- National Alliance of Forest Owners
- National Association of State Foresters
- Tree Care Industry Association
- Vermont Woodlands Association

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