

March 17, 2020

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Tom Udall
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Dear Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Udall,

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 of America's forests 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, both public and private, and is increasingly important for decisions regarding new and expanding markets. We urge Congress to support the FIA program and request funding for the program in **FY 2021, of no less than \$83M. This will ensure that, at a minimum, the historical level of program delivery is accomplished.** We also urge inclusion of language ensuring that this funding would, at minimum, maintain historic remeasurement cycles—every 7 years in the east and every 10 years in the west—as referenced by the Administration.

It has become increasingly difficult to predict the level of funds the Forest Service will devote to overhead expenses out of the Congressional appropriation for the FIA program overhead each year. In FY 2020, the USFS increased overhead charges to FIA by \$3M which has negatively impacted program delivery and currently threatens the collection of data at the 7/10-year cycle. The FY 2021 President's Budget proposes an additional increase of \$1.45M to cover salary increases and pay raises. **The net effect is that an appropriation of \$81.5M is needed to simply maintain level program delivery from the historical funding level of \$77M.**

The data and information collected by FIA serves as the basis for: identifying trends in forest ownership; measuring carbon stocks; assessing fish and wildlife habitat; evaluating wildfire, insect, and disease risk; predicting the spread of invasive species; determining capital investment in existing forest products facilities and selecting locations for new forest product facilities; and identifying and responding to priorities identified in State Forest Action Plans.

The FIA program is utilized by a large set of diverse stakeholders interested in the state of America's forests. These include forest resource managers at mills, land managers, conservation groups, university students and faculty, and State and Federal agencies, such as the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The undersigned organizations would like to work with Congress to further explore program potential. In 2015 the Forest Service released an updated FIA Strategic Plan, which outlines a variety of potential program deliverables at funding levels. While we are supportive of at least \$83M in funding for FY 2021, the 2015 Strategic Plan calls for \$103M to implement the five-year annualized program called for in the 1998 Farm Bill. This reduction in cycle length would provide more accurate data to support important forest resource decisions.

As engaged partners, we are interested in working with Congress and the Forest Service to make program delivery as efficient as possible and to support additional federal investment to implement many of the useful tools outlined in the new FIA Strategic Plan, such as, urban inventory, increased plot density, and improved carbon and biomass estimates. Further, the 2018 Farm Bill called for “finding efficiencies in the program operations through the use of remote sensing technologies, where appropriate.” We look forward to working with the Agency as this direction is implemented. There is a need to make FIA data more robust and more useful for emerging uses, such as accurate information regarding carbon stocks, forest sustainability monitoring, wildlife habitat assessments, and much more. Given the increasing pressures facing our forests—from wildfire, insects and disease, and development—the FIA program is more important now than ever before.

We look forward to working with the committee and the Forest Service to ensure adequate funding is appropriated to provide an accurate and timely inventory of America’s forests, and which is commensurate with our ask in previous years.

Supporting Organizations

Alabama Forestry Association	Mississippi Forestry Association
American Forest Foundation	National Alliance of Forest Owners
American Forest & Paper Association	National Association of Forest Service Retirees
American Loggers Council	National Association of State Foresters
American Wood Council	National Woodland Owners Association
Arkansas Forest and Paper Council	New Hampshire Timberland Owners Association
Arkansas Forestry Association	North Carolina Forestry Association
Association of Consulting Foresters	Oregon Forest & Industries Council
California Forestry Association	Oregon Women in Timber
Ecological Society of America	Railway Tie Association
Florida Forestry Association	Society of American Foresters
Forest Landowners Association	Sustainable Forestry Initiative
Forest Products Industry National Labor- Management Committee	The Hardwood Federation
Forestry Association of South Carolina	The Pennsylvania Forestry Association
Kentucky Forest Industries Association	Treated Wood Council
Massachusetts Forest Alliance	