

**Alliance for Community Trees
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Nursery & Landscape Association
The Hardwood Federation
Michigan United Conservation Clubs
National Association of State Foresters
National Plant Board
The Ohio State University, Department of Entomology
Purdue University, Department of Entomology
Society of American Foresters
The Nature Conservancy
Union of Concerned Scientists
University of Georgia, Center for Invasive Species & Ecosystem Health**

March 12, 2008

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
Chairperson
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Larry Craig
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriation for the USDA Forest Service

Dear Chairperson Feinstein and Ranking Member Craig:

We urge the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to appropriate adequate funding for the USDA Forest Service to manage non-native insects and plant diseases that threaten America's forests. We recommend an FY2009 appropriation of \$123 million for the USDA Forest Service Forest Health Management Program. This level is about \$44 million above the Administration's request and approximately equivalent to the current level of funding. We appreciate your leadership in past years in securing funding for this vital program at levels significantly above the Administration's request.

Our proposed funding level would maintain the program's current level. Under the Administration's request, funding for programs vital to protecting America's forests from such highly damaging introduced insects and diseases as the emerald ash borer, sudden oak death, hemlock woolly adelgid would be reduced by two-thirds or more; funding for the Asian long-horned

beetle would be eliminated altogether. Funding targeting the *Sirex* woodwasp and gypsy moth would be reduced by almost two-thirds. The Forest Health Management program also counters other introduced insects that have attracted less attention, but that still cause significant damage to America's forests. These include Laurel wilt, which is killing redbay and sassafras trees in coastal Georgia and South Carolina; and several insects and pathogens on the islands of Hawaii and Guam.

Maintaining current funding levels would also enable the USDA Forest Service to continue vital support for the pest eradication and containment programs carried out by the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. Forest Service expertise in the pests' biology and detection and management methodology is crucial to the success of these programs. Failure to complete eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle will expose to destruction hardwood forests reaching from New England into Minnesota and smaller areas of the West. Particularly threatened are the hardwood timber, maple syrup, and autumn foliage tourism industries of the Northeast, and street trees across the Nation valued at \$600 billion.

The threat posed by the emerald ash borer is particularly critical. If its spread from the upper Midwest to the rest of the country is not prevented, it will cause losses of urban trees worth as much as \$60 billion. Losses to the timber industry would be \$25 billion in Eastern states. It is vitally important that the Forest Service effort targeting this insect not be reduced.

The USDA Forest Service has the lead responsibility for detecting and responding to any outbreaks of sudden oak death in the hardwood forests of the East. These detection programs must not be halted as the risk of this pathogen being spread by infected nursery plants has not been eliminated. Furthermore, greater vigilance is needed to prevent introductions from Europe or elsewhere of other pathogens threatening to cause similar levels of damage.

Finally, the Forest Health Management Program needs adequate funding to expand its Early Detection project. This program has been responsible for detecting more than a dozen introduced insects, including two which threaten the economically important pine forests of the Southeast: the *Sirex* woodwasp and Mediterranean pine beetle. Steady or increasing funding is necessary to expand this program to cover all states and to develop and deploy methodologies to detect the highly damaging wood-boring beetles.

We recommend an increase of \$3 million above the President's request for the "Invasives R&D" line item within the Forest Service Research program. This would permit maintaining at approximately current levels research aimed at improving detection and control methods for the Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, sudden oak death (also called the phytophthora leaf and stem blight pathogen), gypsy moth, and other non-native forest pests and diseases. Funding at our recommended level would also allow expanded research on the *Sirex* woodwasp, which poses a serious threat to pine resources across the continent.

The agency bearing the principal responsibility for eradicating newly introduced forest pests is not the USDA Forest Service, but rather the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), an agency under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee. The USDA Forest Service plays a critical support role by providing both management expertise and critical research. Nevertheless, the Subcommittee cannot achieve its goal of protecting the Nation's forests' health as long as funding shortfalls undermine USDA APHIS eradication programs. We encourage the Subcommittee to work with the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to find

ways to increase funding for forest pest line items in the USDA APHIS Emerging Plant Pest account.

Sincerely,

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