

Dear Chairs Merkley and Pingree and Ranking Members Murkowski and Joyce:

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 carbon stocks, sustainability, and existing and expanding markets. We feel the needs of our nation's forests, coupled with the policy priorities of this Congress, make this an ideal time to significantly increase investment in this critical program. We thank you for the additional \$4.5 million in funding for Fiscal Year 2022 and look forward to working with you to further improve FIA's capabilities.

We urge Congress to support FIA with no less than \$32.4 million in program dollars and no less than \$52.9 million in salary and expenses in Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23). We recognize that these requests represent a significant increase in funding for FIA, but we believe it is warranted given the many demands currently being placed on the program despite inadequate resources for implementation. **We further request that these increases not be realized at the expense of other critical programs under the Forest and Rangeland Research line item in the Forest Service budget,** or any other state or private forestry programs funded by the Service that also support our nation's forests.

Beginning in FY21, Congress restructured the Forest Service program budgets, separating salary and expenses from program funding. This means that FIA's salary and expenses are now pooled together with all other salary and expenses in the Forest and Rangeland Research budget line. We are concerned by this, as the new structure presents challenges in providing consistency in staffing and hiring across each program to best ensure program delivery. In addition, the lack of a dedicated budget line item (BLI) reduces transparency for partners and Congress. **We request that in FY23 you work with the Forest Service to establish a BLI for FIA that includes explicit funding levels for both program dollars and salaries & expenses.** This would be commensurate with how other programs within Forest Service State and Private Forestry and National Forest Systems are treated in the new budget structure.

In 2015, the Forest Service released an updated FIA Strategic Plan which outlines a variety of potential program deliverables at funding levels. The above funding requests represent the current funding levels needed for the Forest Service and partners to fully and adequately deliver on all the Congressional priorities outlined in the FIA Strategic Plan's "Option C." [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 of 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 increasing demand for FIA data.

Looking forward, we would like to draw attention to the growing importance of moving to a nationwide five-year 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 carbon stocks, 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 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 significantly grow this program and ensure the accurate and timely inventory of America's forests.

Supporting Organizations

American Forest & Paper Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of State Foresters
Society of American Foresters

[1] <https://www.fia.fs.fed.us/library/bus-org-documents/docs/strategic-plan-docs/FIA%20Strategic%20Plan%20FS-1079.pdf>