

DATE

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
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
and Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member, Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
Related Agencies
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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 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 carbon stocks, sustainability, and new and expanding markets. We feel that 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.

With this in mind, we urge Congress to support FIA at no less than \$93.5M in total funding in FY22. Beginning in FY21, Congress restructured the Forest Service program budgets, separating out appropriations for cost pools, salary & expenses, and program funding. **Commensurate with this restructuring, we urge Congress to fund FIA program dollars at no less than \$32.4M in FY22.** This will ensure that state and academic cooperators who partner in the critical data collection and delivery of the FIA program through grants and agreements that help realize programmatic operational efficiencies are fully funded to do their critical work. **However, we request that this increase not be realized at the expense of other critical Forest Service Research & Development or State and Private Forestry programs** that also support our nations forests.

In 2015, the Forest Service released an updated FIA Strategic Plan, which outlines a variety of potential program deliverables at various funding levels. Recent analysis done by the Forest Service estimates that \$93.5M is the funding level needed to deliver "Option C", which includes enhanced timber products monitoring, improved carbon and biomass estimates, enhanced landowner studies, research into land cover and land use change, and urban forest inventory.

These additional items add immense value to the understanding of our nation's forests but are not possible at current funding levels.

The data and information collected by FIA is utilized by a large set of diverse stakeholders and 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.

While we are supportive of at least \$93.5M in funding for FY 2022, Option D of the 2015 Strategic Plan—which calls for additional investment to implement the five-year annualized program called for in the 1998 Farm Bill and to respond to other emerging needs—would necessitate a funding level of \$106M. With the current policy focus on forest carbon monitoring and projection, reducing the cycle length in areas where it would provide more timely carbon data, combined with enhanced remote sensing capabilities, would provide more accurate data to support important forest resource decisions. We look forward to working with Congress to find ways to support funding additional FIA data collection in support of delivering on forest carbon inventory needs.

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. These should include additional investments in the Timber Products Output survey and in new technologies that enhance the core data collection program.

As engaged partners, we are interested in working with Congress and the Forest Service to make program delivery as efficient as possible and to realize additional federal investment to implement many of the useful tools outlined in the FIA Strategic Plan. 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 Forest Service as this direction is implemented.

Finally, we are concerned that under the new budget structure there is not a dedicated salary and expenses budget line for FIA, presenting challenges for the Forest Service R&D program to ensure it is spending an appropriate amount of salary and expenses funding on FIA across the agency, and hiring critical positions to ensure program delivery. **We request you to work with the Forest Service to establish a budget line item for FIA for salaries and expenses.**

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 ensure the accurate and timely inventory of America's forests.

Supporting Organizations