

1                                   **Statement of Tom Tidwell, Chief of the USDA Forest Service**  
2                                   **Before the House Committee on Appropriations,**  
3                                   **Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies**  
4                                   **Concerning President’s Fiscal Year 2017 Proposed Budget**  
5                                   **for the USDA Forest Service**  
6                                   **February 24, 2016**  
7

8   Mister Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me here today to testify  
9   on the President’s (FY) 2017 Budget request for the Forest Service. I appreciate the support this  
10   Subcommittee has shown for the Forest Service in the past. I look forward to continuing to work  
11   together with members of the Committee to ensure that stewardship of our Nation’s forests and  
12   grasslands continues to meet the desires and expectations of the American people. We will  
13   continue to focus our efforts on maintaining collaborative partnerships with our state and local  
14   counterparts to address resource challenges. This budget will allow the Forest Service to  
15   continue to make progress towards our mutual goals while demonstrating fiscal restraint,  
16   efficiency, and cost-effective spending.  
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18                                   **Budget Request and Focus Areas**  
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20   The President’s proposed overall budget for discretionary funding for the Forest Service in FY  
21   2017 is \$4.9 billion. That is \$787 million less than the FY 2016 enacted level and reflects  
22   strategic investments to reduce wildfire threats to communities and maintain forest restoration  
23   investments. The FY 2017 President’s Budget for the Forest Service focuses on three strategic  
24   goals, as identified in our Strategic Plan for FY 2015–2020:<sup>1</sup> (1) sustaining our Nation’s forests  
25   and grasslands; (2) delivering benefits to the public; and (3) applying knowledge globally.  
26   Below, we outline how our budget for FY 2017 will fund programs corresponding to each  
27   strategic goal  
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29   **Strategic Goal 1—Sustaining Our Nation’s Forests and Grasslands**  
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31   The Forest Service responds to the many stressors affecting our landscapes and watersheds by  
32   sustaining and restoring healthy, resilient forests and grasslands. By restoration, we mean  
33   restoring the functions and processes characteristic of healthier, more resistant, more resilient  
34   ecosystems, even if they are not exactly the same ecosystems as before. Our goal is to protect  
35   and restore the ability of America’s forests and grasslands to deliver all the social, economic, and  
36   ecological values and benefits that Americans want and need, both now and for generations to  
37   come.  
38

39   The FY 2017 President’s Budget for the Forest Service will fund the treatments and  
40   infrastructure needed to protect and restore the most critical landscapes.<sup>1</sup> Our goal is to sustain  
41   and restore ecosystems that are capable of (1) furnishing clean and abundant drinking water; (2)  
42   resisting damage from fire, drought, floods, and insects and diseases; and (3) maintaining a  
43   strong productive capacity, thereby supporting economic opportunities for rural communities.  
44   To meet our goal, the FY 2017 President’s Budget makes key investments in the following  
45   program areas:  
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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Forest Service Strategic Plan 2015-2020: [www.fs.fed.us/strategicplan](http://www.fs.fed.us/strategicplan).

- 47 • Ecological restoration – treat 4.7 million acres to restore forest and rangeland health  
48 through landscape scale analysis, adaptive management, partnerships and 2014 Farm bill  
49 authorities.
- 50 • Forest Products (\$359.8 million, the same as the FY 2016 enacted level)—to accelerate  
51 the pace of restoration and continue to work to create healthy landscapes. We anticipate  
52 the sale of 3.2 billion board feet of timber with this funding level.
- 53 • Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (\$40 million, the same level as  
54 enacted for FY 2016)—to continue the 23 existing projects, which reduce the risk of  
55 catastrophic wildfires in high-priority, high-risk areas; improve water quality and  
56 quantity; increase carbon sequestration; and build on innovative implementation and  
57 monitoring work with our partners. In addition, we propose increasing the authorized  
58 funding level for this program from \$40 million to \$80 million for future years.
- 59 • Suppression (\$873.9 million, an increase of \$62.9 million above the FY 2016 enacted  
60 level)—this amount represents 70 percent of the 10-year average costs for fire  
61 suppression, currently calculated at \$1.248 billion. The proposed cap adjustment would  
62 cover the remaining 30 percent of the 10-year average suppression costs as well as any  
63 costs currently funded through fire transfers. For FY 2017, the proposed cap adjustment  
64 is \$864 million.
- 65 • Hazardous Fuels (\$384.1 million, an increase of \$9.1 million above the FY 2016 enacted  
66 level)—to focus on fuels treatments in the wildland/urban interface to reduce the risk of  
67 catastrophic fire on 1.8 million acres.
- 68 • Land Acquisition Program (\$65.7 million in discretionary funding, \$2.2 million above the  
69 FY 2016 enacted level, and \$62.3 million in mandatory funding)—to consolidate  
70 fragmented lands within National Forest System borders and specially designated areas to  
71 support effective land and watershed management. The mandatory funds are part of the  
72 President’s proposal for Land and Water Conservation Fund reauthorization, which calls  
73 for full mandatory funding starting in FY 2018.
- 74 • Forest Legacy Program (\$62.3 million in discretionary funding, the same as the FY 2016  
75 enacted level, and \$37.7 million in mandatory funding)—to focus on preventing the  
76 conversion of private forests to other land uses and parcelization of ownership. The  
77 Forest Legacy Program is a key component of the President’s America’s Great Outdoors  
78 Initiative to conserve critical landscapes and reconnect Americans to the outdoors  
79 through reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with full mandatory  
80 funding starting in FY 2018.

81 **Strategic Goal 2—Deliver Benefits to the Public**

82 The FY 2017 President’s Budget will help the Forest Service with our goal of building thriving  
83 communities by helping ensure abundant clean water, jobs and flourishing local economies, and  
84 opportunities to connect to the outdoors. To meet our goal, the FY 2017 President’s Budget  
85 makes key investments in the following program areas:

- 86 • Landscape Scale Restoration (\$23.5 million, an increase of \$9.5 million above the FY  
87 2016 enacted level)—this increase will fund about 20 more innovative, cross-boundary  
88 projects that target high-priority areas identified in the States’ forest action plans. This  
89 continued investment in cross-boundary, landscape-scale projects on State and private

90 lands will spur innovation, bring partners to the table, support climate change mitigation  
91 and adaptation, and allow the agency to leverage partner contributions. This investment  
92 will sustain and restore forest health across large landscapes, assist urban communities in  
93 protecting their forests, and increase the number of cross-boundary projects. We will  
94 maintain strong collaboration with our state partners to develop solutions to complex  
95 problems.

96 • Recreation, Heritage, and Wilderness (\$264 million, an increase of \$2.2 million above the  
97 FY 2016 enacted level)—this increase will modernize our recreation special uses  
98 program, expand access to the National Forest System, and increase the capacity of our  
99 community service and volunteer programs.

100 • Law Enforcement and Investigations (\$131.6 million, an increase of \$5 million above the  
101 FY 2016 enacted level)—the funds will support intensive operations at marijuana  
102 plantations on the national forests and a comprehensive eradication, dismantling, and  
103 reclamation strategy. The additional resources will pay for removing infrastructure, trash,  
104 debris, and hazardous materials (such as rodenticides and herbicides) at the plantations  
105 and for reclaiming old marijuana sites.

106 • Facilities (\$71.6 million, a slight increase from the FY 2016 enacted level)—to maintain  
107 our developed recreation sites and our fire, administrative, and other facilities.

108 • Forest Health Management (\$92.1 million, a decrease of \$7.5 million below the FY 2016  
109 enacted level)—to address forest health on both federal and cooperative lands by treating  
110 644,000 acres. We will assist landowners through Forest Stewardship to maintain private  
111 forests.

### 112 **Strategic Goal 3—Apply Knowledge Globally**

113  
114 The Forest Service maintains a long record of land management success, even though we work  
115 in complex and changing environments. We attribute our success in part to our world-class  
116 expertise in research and development; our capacity to develop new technologies; our innovation  
117 in forest products; our ability to conduct resource assessments; and our vast collection of  
118 geospatial information, inventory data, and monitoring information.

119 Through intellectual inquiry and knowledge transfer, the Forest Service will continue offering  
120 land managers and others better information, applications, and tools for natural resource  
121 management. By improving our fundamental understanding of forests and grasslands, we will  
122 make better decisions and better achieve our goals of sustaining the Nation’s forests and  
123 grasslands and delivering benefits to the people we serve.

124 The FY 2017 President’s Budget for the Forest Service will fund the research and development  
125 needed to sustain America’s forests and grasslands and to deliver benefits to people. From on-  
126 the-ground natural resource management to long-term strategic policy development, all of our  
127 efforts to sustain forests and grasslands and to deliver benefits to people depend on new  
128 knowledge, information, and applications.

129 To meet our goal, the FY 2017 President’s Budget makes key investments in the following  
130 program areas:

- 131 • Forest Inventory and Analysis (\$77 million, an increase of \$2 million from the FY 2016  
132 enacted level)—to continue to implement the annualized inventory program in all 50  
133 States (including interior Alaska), the affiliated Pacific islands, Puerto Rico, and the U.S.  
134 Virgin Islands.
- 135 • Land Management Planning, Assessment, and Monitoring (\$183.9 million, a slight  
136 decrease from the FY 2016 enacted level)—through implementing the 2012 planning  
137 rule, we will achieve efficiencies in agency assessment and monitoring activities. The  
138 2012 planning rule promotes a collaborative science-based approach for planning,  
139 monitoring, and conducting assessments.
- 140 • International Forestry (\$8 million, the same as the FY 2016 enacted level)—these funds  
141 will help the Forest Service prevent illegal logging internationally, protect U.S. forests  
142 from invasive species, support international policy discussions on climate change and the  
143 role of forests and grasslands in greenhouse gas mitigation, and bring innovative  
144 technology developments to the United States.

### 145 **Legislative Proposals**

146 In connection with the FY 2017 President’s Budget, we propose several key legislative changes  
147 to improve our effectiveness in delivering programs and services:

- 148 • *Fire Suppression Cap Adjustment.* We propose a budget cap adjustment to fund suppression  
149 costs for large and complex fires. Suppression would be funded at a level that covers 98  
150 percent of the fires we fight, or 70 percent of our 10-year average suppression costs.  
151 Remaining fire costs would be funded through an “off-budget” fire suppression cap  
152 adjustment. Off-budget funding would follow from Secretarial declaration of need.
- 153 • *Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.* We propose increasing the  
154 authorized funding level for this successful program from \$40 million to \$80 million, which  
155 would fund up to 10 additional projects. The legislative proposal also extends the end date of  
156 the authority to 2026 to allow for the full implementation of additional projects, should the  
157 Forest Service receive an increased appropriation. We request expansion of authorized  
158 funding levels to support additional collaborative partnerships with local communities.
- 159 • *Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act.* We propose one-year re-authorization of the  
160 Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act. Under the act, 95 percent of the recreation fees  
161 collected on a national forest or grassland are retained at the unit where collected, to be  
162 reinvested in recreation sites and services. This is an interagency proposal together with the  
163 Department of the Interior. The current act expires on September 30, 2017.
- 164 • *Small Tracts Act Conveyance Authority.* We propose establishing additional categories of  
165 National Forest System land that the Secretary of Agriculture is authorized to sell,  
166 interchange, or exchange, if in the public interest. By tying the conveyance authority to the  
167 existing Small Tracts Act, the Forest Service will be better equipped to resolve  
168 landownership and land management challenges, save limited resources, address community  
169 needs, and move appropriate lands into private ownership. The proposal would also  
170 minimally increase the maximum value of the land that could be conveyed to better align  
171 with current land values.
- 172 • *Land and Water Conservation Fund.* The administration proposes permanent authorization  
173 for annual mandatory funding, without further appropriation or fiscal year limitation for the

174 Land and Water Conservation Fund programs in the Departments of the Interior and  
175 Agriculture beginning in FY 2018. Starting in FY 2018, \$900 million annually in mandatory  
176 funds would become available. In FY 2017, our budget proposes \$900 million in total Land  
177 and Water Conservation Fund funding, comprising \$425 million in mandatory and \$475  
178 million in discretionary funds. Proposed language will be transmitted to Congress shortly.

179 • *Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act.* We support Congress  
180 reauthorizing the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act of 2000 and  
181 making payments through mandatory funding. The funding for extending the act through  
182 2020 is included in our Budget Justification, and we look forward to working with the  
183 Committees to develop the legislative proposal.

184 • *Extension of Grazing Permits.* We propose that the terms and conditions of section 325 of  
185 Public Law 108–108 (117 Stat. 1307), which regard grazing permits issued by the Forest  
186 Service on any lands not subject to administration under section 402 of the Federal Lands  
187 Policy and Management Act (43 U.S.C. 1752), shall remain in effect for FY 2017. This  
188 would address recent amendments to section 402 of the Federal Land Policy and  
189 Management Act and public concerns that the amendments do not apply to grazing permits  
190 issued by the Forest Service on the national grasslands and on eastern national forests.

191 • *Direct-Hire Authority.* We propose direct-hire authority for resource assistant interns who  
192 have successfully completed the new Resource Assistant Program. The program is designed  
193 to attract recent graduates of institutions of higher education, with particular emphasis on  
194 women and on graduates from historically Black, Hispanic, and Native American schools or  
195 other schools with diverse student populations. Direct-hire authority will give us more  
196 flexibility in recruiting successful graduates of the program into our workforce.

197 • *Grazing Administrative Processing Fees.* The President’s Budget includes appropriations  
198 language for a 3-year pilot project to allow the Forest Service to recover some of the costs of  
199 issuing grazing permits/leases on National Forest System lands. The Forest Service would  
200 charge a fee of \$2.50 per animal unit month, which would be collected along with current  
201 grazing fees. The fee will help the Forest Service pay for processing pending applications for  
202 grazing permit renewals. During the period of the pilot, the Forest Service would work  
203 through the process of promulgating regulations for the continuation of the grazing  
204 administrative fee as a cost recovery fee after the pilot expires. The fees will be credited to  
205 the Management of Lands and Resources appropriation. The estimate for 2017 is \$15  
206 million.

## 207 **Future Outlook**

208  
209 The Forest Service serves the American people by ensuring that their forests and grasslands  
210 deliver a full range of values and benefits, including hundreds of thousands of jobs and annual  
211 contributions to the economy worth many times more than our entire annual discretionary  
212 budget.

213  
214 Now we are facing some of the greatest challenges in our history. Invasive species, climate  
215 change effects, regional drought and watershed degradation, fuel buildups and severe wildfires,  
216 habitat fragmentation and loss of open space, and devastating outbreaks of insects and disease all  
217 threaten the ability of America’s forests and grasslands to continue delivering the ecosystem  
218 services that Americans want and need. In response, the Forest Service is increasing the pace and

219 scale of ecological restoration. We are working to create healthy, resilient forest and grassland  
220 ecosystems capable of sustaining and delivering clean air and water, habitat for wildlife,  
221 opportunities for outdoor recreation, and many other benefits.

222  
223 Our budget request focuses on restoring resilient landscapes, building thriving communities, and  
224 safely managing wildland fire while providing an effective emergency response. Our requested  
225 budget will enable us to continue to make progress addressing the growing extent and magnitude  
226 of our management challenges and to furnish the mix of values and benefits that the public  
227 expects from the national forests and grasslands. Our budget priorities highlight the need to  
228 strengthen cooperation, collaboration, and public/private partnerships that leverage our  
229 investments to reach shared goals. Through strategic partnerships, we can accomplish more work  
230 while also yielding more benefits for all Americans, for the sake of all generations to come.

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232 This concludes my testimony, Mister Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions that  
233 you or the Committee members have for me.

DRAFT