

The Honorable Harris Sherman
Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Mr. Tom Tidwell
Chief
United States Forest Service
1401 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0003

October 17, 2012

Dear Undersecretary Sherman and Chief Tidwell,

We are writing to express our strong support for the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program. The Community Forest Program provides matching funds to help local government entities, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations to purchase forestlands threatened with development for local ownership and management. We greatly appreciate the Administration's commitment to the Community Forest Program as reflected in the President's FY2013 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service. We urge you to continue this support by including at least \$4 million for the Community Forest Program in the President's FY2014 budget request for the agency. This should include funding for the states to administer the program and to provide technical assistance as directed in the program's authorizing language.

We were grateful to see the first round of Community Forest Program grants awarded this summer using FY2012 and prior year funding. The diversity of applications from across the country—49 total projects seeking \$14.5 million—demonstrated the breadth of need for this kind of locally-led conservation. The U.S. Forest Service received strong applications from local governments, tribes, and a wide array of local non-profit organizations. The proposed projects collectively offered leverage of more than \$3 in non-federal funding for every \$1 requested in Community Forest Program funds. This demonstrates the willingness of local entities to match federal funding with significant commitments of funding and other resources.

The widespread loss of private forests to non-forest uses provides urgency for the Community Forest Program. The U.S. Forest Service report *Private Forests, Public Benefits* projected that 57 million acres of America's private forests could experience a substantial increase in housing density by 2030.

Given the strong interest in the Community Forest Program, it is important to provide adequate funding to meet demand. The Community Forest Program can play a particularly strategic role within the America's Great Outdoors Initiative (AGO). Locally-owned forests help advance the AGO goals to increase opportunities for Americans to connect with forests in their own communities and foster new public-private partnerships for conservation.

As evidenced by the projects submitted in FY2012, the Community Forest Program can be particularly helpful toward the AGO goal to reconnect young people with our forests. Community forests provide an outdoor classroom, and often are located close to schools and neighborhoods where children can easily gain access. Adult-led programming in forestry and outdoor recreation was a common theme among many of the FY2012 proposals submitted for the Community Forest Program.

A strong investment in the Community Forest Program as part of the President's FY2014 budget request for the U.S. Forest Service will help maintain the momentum that the agency and its many partners have created. We expect very strong demand for anticipated FY2013 appropriations. Additional funding in FY2014 would help continue to meet demand for new community forests across the country, and build future interest. Thank you for your consideration of this request, and please do not hesitate to contact any of us for more information.

Sincerely,

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