

Report to the Secretary of Agriculture
Forestry Research Advisory Council¹
November 12, 2015

Our nation's forests contribute to the health, environmental, and economic vitality of society by providing goods and services ranging from clean water and carbon sequestration to wood products, recreation, and tourism. For example, outdoor recreation on national forest system lands generates \$9.5 billion in retail sales, 189,400 jobs, and \$1 billion in federal tax revenue annually. Moreover, our forest resources have potential to revitalize rural America and our industry can reclaim international leadership and capacity in the advanced manufacturing of wood products. At the same time, the abundance and diversity of threats to our nation's forests are unprecedented. Forestry research must be strengthened and expanded to address these threats and ensure that forest management decisions can be made based on sound science into the 21st century. To that end, FRAC submits the following recommendations for your consideration.

Work with Congress to adopt and implement alternative wildfire funding mechanisms.

The cost of suppressing large, high-severity wildfires is eclipsing important programs including restoration, recreation, and forest management. Fire borrowing is disrupting mission critical research and handicapping science. It is imperative that fire borrowing stop. FRAC strongly recommends:

- Adjustments to discretionary spending limits be made to accommodate adequate appropriations for wildfire suppression operations. This should include classifying wildfires as Federal Disasters and funding their suppression efforts under Federal Emergency declarations.

Expand Forest Service Research and Development capacity and funding

The USDA Forest Service R&D Budget is inadequate compared to the urgent need for research and the economic benefits that forests provide. FRAC recommends:

- The Forest Service R&D budget be no less than 10% of the total agency budget. Additionally, FRAC recommends, as it did in its February 2015 letter, that this be achieved through incremental increases across the next three fiscal years, if not sooner.
- The Forest Service create a virtual center of social science excellence in partnership with universities, tribes, and the private sector. Given the central social dimension of national forest management, FRAC is encouraged by the newly filled position National Program Leader in Social Science.
- The Forest Service focus on increasing social science research capacity in partnership with universities, tribes and the private sector and diversify the social science disciplinary capacity beyond its core capacity in rural sociology to include more geography, anthropology, political science and public administration, and other areas that would allow purchase on a wide array of social challenges facing the Forest Service and our nation's forests more broadly, including landowner engagement in active management and communicating the value of working forests and benefits derived from sound forest management.

Enhance USDA extramural research and university research capacity

The FRAC continues to be deeply concerned by the diminishing capacity for forestry research in the United States. Funding to support forestry research programs is inadequate and there are insufficient opportunities for developing the next generation of forest scientists. There is anecdotal evidence strongly suggesting this nation faces broad declines in the number of forest scientists and PhD candidates in crucial disciplines such as genetics, soils, plant pathology, and entomology. FRAC recommends:

- NIFA determine if there are indeed shortages in critical areas of forestry science and then utilize its existing Higher Education Competitive Grants Programs to support graduate student fellowships in these disciplines. At the same time, USDA should consider modifying current policies so that Forest Service and McIntire-Stennis funds can be used for graduate student tuition remission. This restriction limits graduate student engagement, diminishing the development of future scientists. These targeted investments are necessary if this nation is going to continue to have a highly trained

scientific infrastructure that can respond to current and future threats, such as climate change, invasive forest insects and pathogens, and opportunities such as development of new forest products and responding to the increasing societal demands on forests.

Strengthen and modernize the McIntire-Stennis Program

FRAC recommends:

- The 1994 Land Grant Tribal Colleges and Universities be added to the institutions eligible to receive McIntire-Stennis funds. Tribal lands are used in the existing formula to calculate state allocations for 1862 and 1890 land-grant universities, but Tribal colleges and universities do not benefit from the contribution their tribes' lands make.
- Funding for the McIntire-Stennis program be increased to \$50 million dollars in fiscal year FY 2017 to address urgent research need brought on by the expanding threats to the nation's forest resources and to accommodate an expansion of eligible recipient institutions.
- FRAC believes that McIntire-Stennis funding should continue to be specifically directed at domestic research priorities and activities, not to support international activities in forestry research. While many forest issues are global in scale there is much potential for these activities to overshadow domestic research and graduate student education.
- FRAC also recommends NIFA review the formula for allocating McIntire-Stennis funds to States. The current formula is based on commercial forest area, annual timber harvest volumes, and contributions of non-federal matching funds. The formula for the allocation of funds among States should reflect the more contemporary recognition of the broad range of forest benefits (e.g. recreation, water storage, carbon sequestration, biodiversity). Further, the McIntire-Stennis authorization takes a much more expansive view of forestry research and the objectives of the program, and the FRAC believes the formula should more closely reflect that.

Revitalize of rural America through “All Lands Management,” and technology development

The Forest Service should continue research on forest products that are energy efficient, sequester carbon, and increase rural vitality. Projects should include the use of wood in mass timber construction, nanotechnology, and other innovative and traditional wood products. Research efforts should enhance understanding drivers of consumption, wood utilization and supply, and markets. FRAC recommends:

- The Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program continue to be adequately funded so that the current sampling intensity and frequency can be maintained. The public and private innovation sectors must have accurate and timely data about U.S. forest resources in order to make informed decisions on product development and manufacturing opportunities.
- Funding be requested through the appropriations process in FY 2017 for the Farm Bill-authorized “Forestry Products Advanced Utilization Research” (Section 7310) program. This program can generate innovation through competition and contribute to a science enterprise with cutting edge research to lead to new uses for wood.
- NIFA should hire a National Program Leader for wood products and technology to provide scientific leadership and coordinate programs in forest products and advanced manufacturing.

¹ *The members of the Forestry Research Advisory Council (FRAC) are: John Alexander, Klamath Bird Observatory; Nicole Cavender, The Morton Arboretum; Kevin C.K. Cheung, Western Wood Products Association; Daniel Dructor, American Loggers Council; Alexander Evans, Forest Guild; Alex Finkel, The Forestland Group, LLC; Myron Floyd, North Carolina State University; Lance Holter, Lance Holter Realty; Shibu Jose, University of Missouri; Henry Kodama, State Forester, South Carolina; Adrian Leighton, Intertribal Timber Council; Deborah McCullough, Michigan State University; Cassandra Moseley (Chair), University of Oregon; Eric Norland, National Institute of Food and Agriculture; Shannon Ramsay, Trees Forever, Inc.; Ronald Reed, Karuk Tribe; Carlos Rodriguez-Franco, USDA Forest Service; Robert L. Smith, ; Glenn Stanoz, University of Wisconsin-Madison; and Charles “Buck” Vandersteen, Louisiana Forestry Association.*