

Secretary Tom Vilsack
Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Chief Vicki Christiansen
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

July 14, 2021

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Christiansen,

The Federal Advisory Committee for the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP) met virtually June 29 – July 1, 2021 to evaluate submitted CFLRP extensions and provide recommendations to the Secretary of Agriculture for final selections. We are pleased to report that the Committee came to consensus on a set of recommendations.

The Committee's charter asked members to evaluate project proposals using key criteria including the strength of the ecological approach, likelihood of reducing the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire, the strength of the collaborative process, benefit to local economies, utilization of biomass, and alignment with a shared stewardship approach.

This year, we were asked to review and rank extensions from projects originally funded in 2012, and then consider the extensions along with the new projects we ranked in 2020, to create a new revised set of recommendations. Because the top project (Northern Blues) and two extensions (Deschutes and Dinkey) we recommended in 2020 have been funded, they are not in our final list. We did not change the order of recommended projects from 2020; instead, we slotted the proposed extensions among the new projects.

Throughout the meeting our discussions included broader themes such as past performance, the length of the extension request, the amount and type of work to be completed, the importance of the work to the social and economic fabric of a community, robustness of collaboration, and capacity to do the work.

A consistent theme in the extension requests was the impact of unexpected challenges such as wildfires, hurricanes, litigation, staff turnover, or competing priorities. For several extensions it was clear that delays in implementation were due to a forest having to navigate multiple stressors at once.

Unfortunately, these scenarios are likely to become more common, and the agency's ability to adapt to these events will be critical to future success. There were also persistent challenges, including the ability to implement prescribed fire. Limitations on the implementation of prescribed fire were another key factor in evaluating extension requests.

Based on these considerations, we unanimously recommend funding all but one of the proposed extensions, and have prioritized the new projects and extensions as follows:

Rank	Region	State	Proposal	New or Extension	Year 1 Request for CFLRP Discretionary Funding ¹
1	2 & 3	New Mexico & Colorado	Rio Chama	New	\$3,000,000
2	2	Colorado	Southwest Colorado Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative	New	\$3,000,000
3	5	California	Western Klamath Mountains Forest and Fire Resiliency Project	New	\$3,000,000
4	3	New Mexico	Zuni Mountains	Extension	\$1,000,000
5	6	Oregon	Lakeview Stewardship	Extension	\$1,979,955
6	6	Oregon	Southern Blues Restoration Coalition	Extension	\$3,000,000
7	9	Missouri	Missouri Pine Oaks Woodland Project	Extension	\$180,366
8	8	Arkansas & Oklahoma	Shortleaf Bluestem	Extension	\$1,120,000
9	6	Washington	North Central Washington	New	\$1,400,000
10	5	California	North Yuba Forest Partnership	New	\$3,000,000
11	6	Oregon	Rogue Basin Landscape Restoration Project	New	\$2,994,600
12	6	Washington	Northeast Washington Forest Vision	Extension	\$3,100,000
13	8	North Carolina	Pisgah Restoration Initiative	New	\$700,000
14	8	Mississippi	Longleaf Pine Ecosystem Restoration and Hazardous Fuels Reduction	Extension	\$1,093,053
15	4	Idaho	Western Central Idaho Initiative	New	\$3,000,000
16	1	Idaho & Washington	Idaho Panhandle National Forest Joint Collaboratives	New	\$1,200,000
17	4	Idaho	Weiser Little Salmon Headwaters	Extension	\$850,000
18	8	Arkansas	Restoring Resiliency of the Interior Highlands and Coastal Plains of Arkansas	New	\$1,750,625
19	1	Montana	Ravali Roots	New (Alternate)	\$1,457,300
20	2	Colorado	Colorado Front Range Landscape Restoration	New (Alternate)	\$3,000,000
21	6	Washington	Northeast Washington Selkirks	New (Alternate)	\$465,000

We do not recommend extending CFLRP funding for the Burney Hat Creek project in Region 5. We recognize that there is important restoration work to do on this landscape, but we found that the project proposal needs further refinement before it warrants continued investment of CFLRP funds. The Committee is dedicated to offering feedback to the project proponents, with the expectation that the project can reapply in the future.

¹ Year 1 discretionary funding requests from the 2020 New projects are estimates – year 1 requests (developed in FY2020) are being updated given budget modernization changes to what CFLRP can cover beginning FY 2021.

Since its enactment in 2009, CFLRP has a proven track record of success and bipartisan support. It has brought collaboration to our forests to increase forest health, mitigate wildfires, and support rural economies and local voices. The 2018 Farm Bill authorizes annual funding for up to \$80 million; the Committee is pleased that the President's FY 2022 Budget requests the full amount. The total Year 1 funding requested by the approved new projects and our recommended extensions is \$35 million, not including alternates. Using the Forest Service's new budget modernization approach, we estimate there should be more than enough funding to support all the projects on this list and existing projects. If there is additional funding, we recommend the administration call for new proposals to continue to address the collaborative forest restoration needs on national forests.

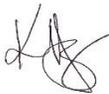
At the beginning of our meeting, Deputy Chief for National Forest Systems Chris French encouraged the Committee to consider the context and urgency of increasing wildfire risk during our deliberations. We all are concerned about the historic drought in the West, and the likelihood of another very difficult wildfire season for both communities and firefighters. A unique strength of CFLRP is its focus on a suite of ecological, social, and economic objectives, which we considered in addition to mitigating high severity wildfire risk. As a result, the Committee considered this full range of objectives in our deliberations and final ranking.

Committee members continue to be interested in supporting the Forest Service in both delivering on the promise of CFLRP and providing advice on the range of topics Mr. French addressed. We encourage the Forest Service to utilize our expertise and continue to engage us in an advisory role as needed.

In closing, we want to thank the Forest Service and its staff, especially Jessica Robertson and Lindsay Buchanan, for their hard work in organizing and standing up the Committee, and their dedication to the Program's success. We especially want to thank Chief Christiansen for her exemplary service to both the Forest Service and our nation's forests throughout her career and wish her the best going forward. We look forward to working with the new Forest Service Chief, Randy Moore.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KH' with a stylized flourish below it.

Karen Hardigg

Committee Chair