Over a year ago, the U.S. Government (USG) deployed a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to coordinate the USG response to the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak in West Africa. The outbreak—the first in West Africa and the most widespread in history—began in forested areas of southeastern Guinea in December 2013. By mid-2014, the disease had spread to neighboring Liberia and Sierra Leone, with additional cases found in Mali, Nigeria, and Senegal. As of May 20, 2015, EVD had killed 10,880 people and infected an estimated 26,000 people, including 3,600 in Guinea, 10,300 in Liberia, and 12,400 in Sierra Leone. EVD is a severe illness transmitted through direct contact with the blood, bodily fluids, and tissues of infected animals or people.

In March 2014, the U.S. Agency for International Development, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) authorized monetary support for response efforts in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. In July 2014, USAID/OFDA sent a public health advisor to conduct assessments in countries affected by the outbreak. Based on this effort, the U.S. Ambassador or U.S. Chargés d’Affaires in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone declared disasters in early August due to the effects of the disease. In response, the USG deployed a field-based DART to Monrovia, Liberia, in August, 2014, and later to Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Conakry, Guinea. The DART worked to identify key needs stemming from the Ebola outbreak, amplify humanitarian response efforts, and coordinate all USG efforts to support the response. The USG also established a corresponding Response Management Team (RMT) based in Washington, D.C. In November 2014, the U.S. Chargé d’Affaires in Mali declared a disaster, and the USG deployed DART staff to Mali.
The Forest Service made significant contributions to the USG response because of the inter-agency agreement between the U.S. Forest Service International Programs and USAID/OFDA. With funding from the USAID, 16 Forest Service staff members served on the DART, working alongside their USAID colleagues in the field as logistics officers, field officers, civil-military affairs officers, and emergency operations center specialists in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Additionally, more than 20 Forest Service staff members served on the USAID Response Management Team (RMT) in Washington, DC, providing hands-on assistance in communications, planning, staffing, and logistics.

Overall, USAID’s relief activities in West Africa included support for Ebola treatment units and community care centers, safe burial teams, community education to prevent the spread of the disease, and the provision of personal protective equipment and relief commodities. Finally, due to partnerships between the affected countries and the international community, the incidence of EVD cases in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea decreased from an average of 1,070 per week between November-December 2014, to below 10 cases per week from August-September 2015.