American Forest Foundation
California Forest Pest Council
City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation, Bureau of Forestry
Davey Institute
International Maple Syrup Institute
Mulch & Soil Council
National Association of State Foresters
National Plant Board
The Nature Conservancy
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
North American Maple Syrup Council, Inc.
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture
Purdue University, Department of Entomology
Society of American Florists
Union of Concerned Scientists

March 19, 2010

The Honorable James P. Moran
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Michael K. Simpson
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Fiscal Year 2011 Appropriation for the USDA Forest Service

Dear Chairman Moran and Ranking Member Simpson:

We urge the Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies to appropriate adequate funding for the USDA Forest Service to manage non-native insects and plant diseases that threaten America's forests. We recommend an FY2011 appropriation of $145 million for the USDA Forest Service Forest Health Management Program. This level is about $7 million above the current level of funding.

In addition, we ask that you provide an increase of $3 million above the FY10 appropriations level for the "Invasives R&D" line item within the Forest Service Research program. This increase reflects the significant gaps in knowledge about monitoring techniques and tools, as well as in how populations of non-native pests will develop, expand and impact our U.S. forested systems. We ask the Congress to support further research to be better able to develop and implement appropriate management programs for these non-native pests.

We thank the Subcommittee for substantially increasing funding for the Forest Health Management Program in FY2010. The increase resulted in substantial new resources being devoted to improving detection and control methods for the emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid, and sudden oak death (SOD; also called the phytophthora leaf and stem blight pathogen); and maintenance of programs targeting the gypsy moth and other non-native forest pests and diseases. The added funding also allows the USFS to address new pests threatening forests across the country, including thousand canker disease (which threatens black walnuts nationwide); gold-spotted oak borer (which is killing oak trees in southern California); and laurel wilt disease (which is killing redbay, sassafras, and other trees and shrubs in coastal regions of the Southeast). Funding at our recommended level supports continued expansion of these important programs, which benefit both rural and urban communities.

The Forest Health program provides vital expertise in forest pests' biology and detection and management methodology that is crucial to the success of pest eradication and containment programs implemented by the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service. As these forest pests are detected in new areas, the importance of the Forest Service's contribution rises. The USDA Forest Service has the lead responsibility for detecting and responding to any outbreaks of sudden oak death in the forest. The Forest Service has provided most of the funds utilized by Oregon in its SOD containment program; this program has succeeded in containing spread of the disease through vulnerable forests in the southwest corner of the state. Detection programs managed under the Forest Health Monitoring Program have surveyed 320 watersheds across the country. Watersheds have been found with evidence of the sudden oak death pathogen – outside the infested areas in California and Oregon. These include streams in four southeastern states with substantial vulnerable oak forests – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Mississippi. Both programs must continue in order to protect vulnerable forests.

The emerald ash borer has now been detected in thirteen states. The Forest Service's Forest Health Protection program provides expertise in detecting this elusive insect, in developing more effective tools to curtail its spread, and in advising landowners on how to respond to the threat. For example, the Forest Service helps to fund a website maintained by the Continental Forest Dialogue (www.dontmovefirewood.org) in order to educate the public not to transport potentially infested wood that can spread pests. The Forest Service, involved cooperatively with APHIS, is evaluating mitigation tools and strategies to be utilized by newly infested regions to slow or curtail the spread of this devastating pest. It is vitally important that the Forest Service effort targeting this insect not be reduced. The Forest Service is working with state forestry departments through the Great Plains Initiative to help those states prepare for the widespread tree mortality that the emerald ash borer will cause.

Finally, the Forest Health Management Program needs adequate funding to expand its Early Detection project. This program has been responsible for detecting more than a dozen introduced insects, including two which threaten the economically important pine forests of the Southeast: the sirex woodwasp and the Mediterranean pine beetle. The detection program now covers all states on a three-year rotation. It now must develop and deploy methodologies to detect the highly damaging wood-boring beetles.

As the majority of southern forests are in private ownership, a landowner assistance program for early detection and rapid response for these pine pests should be considered

The agency bearing the principal responsibility for eradicating newly introduced forest pests is not the USDA Forest Service, but rather the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

(APHIS), an agency under the jurisdiction of the Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee. The USDA Forest Service plays a critical support role by providing both management expertise and critical research – in close coordination with APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine and through cooperative funding agreements with state forestry, state departments of agriculture and state land grant universities.

Nevertheless, the Subcommittee cannot achieve its goal of protecting the health of the nation's forests as long as funding shortfalls undermine USDA APHIS eradication programs. We encourage the Subcommittee to work with the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee to find ways to increase funding for forest pest line items in the USDA APHIS Emerging Plant Pest account.

Sincerely,

American Forest Foundation: Tom Martin, President and CEO
California Forest Pest Council: Bob Rynearson, Chairman
City of Chicago Department of Streets and Sanitation, Bureau of Forestry: Joseph J. McCarthy, Senior City Forester
Davey Institute: Anand B. Persad, Ph.D., B.C.E., Regional Technical Advisor
International Maple Syrup Institute: Gary Gaudette, President
Mulch & Soil Council: Robert C. LaGasse, Executive Director
National Association of State Foresters: Jay Farrell, Executive Director
National Plant Board: Carl P. Schulze, Jr., President
The Nature Conservancy: Robert L. Bendick, Director, Government Relations
New York State Department of Environmental Conservation: Robert K. Davies, New York State Forester, Director of Lands and Forests
North American Maple Syrup Council, Inc.: Rick Marsh, President
Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture: Russell C. Redding, Secretary
Purdue University, Department of Entomology: Clifford S. Sadof, Professor
Society of American Florists: Lin Schmale, Senior Director, Government Relations
Union of Concerned Scientists, Phyllis N. Windle, Ph.D., Senior Scientist and Director, Invasive Species