

**Written Testimony of the Sustainable Urban Forest Coalition
To the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
May 26, 2017**

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies

Dear Chairman Calvert, Ranking Member McCollum, and Honorable Committee Members:

The Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) is comprised of more than 30 national organizations and corporations representing hundreds of thousands of professionals and millions of supporters who care and support sustainable trees and green infrastructure where people live. Collectively, we are asking for your support for several programs under the Interior Subcommittee’s jurisdiction that support urban and community forests and green infrastructure.

Our nation’s 138 million acres of urban and community forest lands affect over 80% of the U.S. population and are vital to creating and maintaining healthy, livable communities of all sizes by providing many scientifically proven social, economic, and environmental benefits to people. The ability to mitigate air pollution, reduce energy consumption, mitigate the heat island effect, improve human health, and reduce storm water runoff have directly or indirectly reduced costs in communities by millions of dollars. The collective value and benefits of community trees equals over \$10 billion nationwide. With a projected 90% of Americans living in urbanized areas by 2050, investing in trees to create livable communities needs to happen now.

A key goal in the 10-year National Urban and Community Forestry Action Plan (facilitated and stewarded by the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council) is to improve the nation’s urban and community forest management, maintenance, and stewardship. The green jobs related to trees and landscapes is a \$9 billion-dollar industry and is poised to grow and create local jobs that cannot be outsourced.

SUFC is conscious of the federal budget challenges, and greatly appreciates the FY 2017 funding levels provided by this Subcommittee. Respectfully, we ask you to reject the drastic cuts proposed in the President’s FY 2018 budget. We are deeply concerned by the zeroing out of important and effective programs like Urban and Community Forestry, Landscape Scale Restoration, and Community Forests and Open Space Conservation. Defunding or severely cutting these programs will have profound and lasting repercussions on people and communities across the country—particularly those in rural areas where these funds are essential.

USDA Forest Service: State and Private Forestry

• **Urban and Community Forestry Program (U&CF)**

U&CF directly assists state government, nonprofit organizations and partners that manage and steward our nation’s urban and community forests. Working with the state forestry agencies, the program provides technical, financial, research, and educational support and services to local

government, nonprofit organizations, community groups, educational institutions, and tribal governments.

U&CF helps cities and towns across the nation prepare for storms and other disturbance events, contain threats from native and invasive pests, and improve tree infrastructure and forest cover. Properly managed community forests offer towns and municipalities a cost-effective way to manage stormwater runoff, reduce heating and cooling costs, and attract more tourists and consumers. They help communities avoid storm and disaster costs through preparedness and training, and maximize the economic, social, and ecological benefits of their tree resources.

In FY 2016, U&CF reached over 7,800 communities and 200+ million people in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, US Territories, and affiliated Pacific Island Nations. U&CF is a high-impact program and a smart investment as federal support is often leveraged 2:1 (or in many cases significantly more) by states and partner organizations. U&CF engages citizens in cities and towns, brings together diverse partners, public and private resources, and demonstrates that federal investment can have huge and lasting impacts on communities of all sizes.

SUFC is deeply concerned by the President's proposal to defund the U&CF program in FY 2018. The 50% funding decrease originally proposed in the President's FY 2017 budget would have had severe negative impacts in states and territories across the country. But now, zeroing out this important program would completely erode the capacity that has been developed in cities and towns of all sizes and jeopardize many local public and private partnerships and collaborative projects in which federal assistance is essential. **SUFC recommends the Urban and Community Forestry Program be funded at \$31.3 million in FY 2018.**

- **Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR)**

The LSR program strategically prioritizes resources by competitively allocating Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act funds. It focuses on targeting federal investments—leveraged by state and local resources—to areas of greatest need, highest value, or strongest innovation potential, as stipulated in each State Forest Action Plan. Urban and community forestry projects have been supported by LSR in the past. However, we want to ensure that LSR is not a substitute to the Urban and Community Forestry program, but a supplement. **SUFC recommends funding the Landscape Scale Restoration program at \$23.5 million in FY 2018.**

- **Community Forests and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP)**

CFP has made substantial progress in preserving forests by increasing opportunities for Americans to connect with forests in their own communities and fostering new public-private partnerships. CFP has supported nearly three dozen community forest projects in cities and towns across 17 states and territories. In the latest round of CFP grants, project partners leveraged \$10.6 million in federal funds to secure \$34.5 million in non-federal funding, resulting in more than 15,000 acres of community forests. This impressive leveraging ratio demonstrates the willingness of local entities to match federal funding with significant commitments of funding and other resources. **SUFC recommends an increase in funds to \$5 million in FY 2018.**

- **Forest Health Management**

Forests across the country are threatened by insects and disease pathogens introduced from abroad as an unwanted side effect of international trade. The damage usually starts in urban forests because most imported goods enter this country through urban ports. As a result,

municipal governments across the country are spending an estimated \$3 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by non-native pests. Homeowners are spending an additional \$1 billion to remove and replace trees on their properties and are absorbing an additional \$1.5 billion in reduced property values. The pests do not stay in the cities, however. They spread to the rural and wildland forests and threaten their many values. While preventing introductions are the desired approach, it is essential that the U.S. Forest Service initiate programs countering these pests as soon as they are detected. Only such prompt and aggressive actions can protect urban, rural, and wildland forests from massive pest spread and tree devastation. This program provides essential expertise and assistance to state and municipal agencies and private landowners working to prevent these pests' spread and to develop effective strategies to minimize the damage they cause. **SUFC recommends \$48 million for cooperative lands programs under the Forest Health Management program.**

USDA Forest Service: Forest and Rangeland Research

SUFC urges the Subcommittee to provide \$303 million for the overall R&D program.

- **Urban and Community Forestry Research**

The Forest Service Research and Development (R&D) program provides critical financial support for urban forestry research activities to develop information and tools for understanding conditions and trends in our nation's urban and community forests. U.S. Forest Service researchers have made huge strides in recent years through collaborative efforts to develop new tools, such as i-Tree, for mapping current tree cover, assessing trends, developing local strategies, and building greater understanding of the environmental, economic, and social services that trees and forests provide to communities. **We urge the Subcommittee to continue including language in Interior Appropriations reports encouraging the Forest Service to maintain a strong and vibrant urban forest research program.**

- **Non-native Insects and Diseases Research**

Among the major research challenges facing R&D is the destruction of our nation's urban forests caused by non-native insects and diseases. People who value urban forests join supporters of rural and wildland forests in depending on Forest Service R&D to develop better tools for pest detection and protective strategies including chemical and biological controls and breeding of trees resistant to pests. Currently, however, R&D provides only about \$5 million for research on non-native insects and diseases—less than two percent of its total budget. **In the absence of a budget line item for invasive species research, we urge the Subcommittee to include language in its Interior Appropriations report encouraging the Forest Service to increase funding for research targeting non-native insects and pathogens.**

- **Urban Forests in Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)**

The collaborative efforts between SUFC and the U.S. Forest Service brought urban forest data into the mainstream of the agency's national data-collection program. FIA has long provided the nation's forest census, but it had not historically included urban areas because of its definition of forests. **We ask the Subcommittee to encourage the Forest Service to continue and strengthen its efforts to integrate urban forest data into FIA so that its critical data-collection efforts address all of our nation's forests, including our current and expanding 138 million acres of urban forest.**

Environmental Protection Agency

- **Clean Water State Revolving Funds (CWSRF)**

Green infrastructure, including urban forests, can be a cost-effective and resilient approach to managing stormwater. The use of green infrastructure for stormwater control also provides many community co-benefits enumerated above. SUFC is pleased that EPA supports the use of green infrastructure for stormwater management and that green infrastructure is an eligible use under the CWSRF—a critical financing program for local communities investing in water infrastructure. CWSRF funding was maintained in the President’s Preliminary FY 2018 Budget proposal at the FY 2017 level of \$1.394 billion. **SUFC supports robust funding for CWSRF along with efforts to expand the use of green infrastructure to 20% to meet Clean Water Act goals.**

The National Park Service

- **Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program (ORLPP)**

The State and Local Assistance Program provides matching grants to states and localities for protection and development of parks and recreation resources and is the primary federal investment tool to ensure that families have easy access to urban forests in parks and open space, and neighborhood recreation resources. This nationally competitive program complements the existing state and local assistance program by creating opportunities for outdoor play as well as developing or enhancing outdoor recreation partnerships in cities. **SUFC requests \$110 million for the state and local assistance program, which includes \$12 million for ORLPP.**

Sincerely,

SUFC Members:

Alliance for Community Trees * American Forests * American Planning Association * American Rivers * American Society of Consulting Arborists * American Society of Landscape Architects * Arbor Day Foundation * Center for Invasive Species Prevention * The Davey Foundation * International Society of Arboriculture * Keep America Beautiful * National Association of Clean Water Agencies * National Association of Conservation Districts * National Association of State Foresters * National Recreation and Parks Association * The Nature Conservancy * Society of American Foresters * Society of Municipal Arborists * Tree Care Industry Association * TREE Fund * The Trust for Public Land * Water Environment Federation * Wildlife Habitat Council

Supporters:

Alleghany Society of American Foresters * California ReLeaf * California Urban Forests Council * Canopy * Casey Trees * Center for Climate Change and Health * City of Seattle’s Office of Sustainability and Environment * Colorado Tree Coalition * Community Services Employment Training * Fathers and Families of San Joaquin * Friends of Carmel Forest * Friends of the Urban Forest * From Lot to Spot * Greenspace-The Cambria Land Trust * Huntington Beach Tree Society * Industrial District Green * Just One Tree * Leibman Associates, Inc. * Los Angeles Beautification Team * Our City Forest * Parent Pioneers * Pinchot Institute for Conservation * Richmond Trees * Sacramento Tree Foundation * Save Our Forest/Fallbrook Land Conservancy * Solano Advocates Green Environments * Sonoma Ecology Center * The Tree Foundation of Kern * Tree Fresno * Tree San Diego * Victoria Avenue Forever * West Coast Arborists * Western Chapter-International Society of Arboriculture * Woodland Tree Foundation * Woodstock Tree Board * Your Children’s Trees