

American Forests, Appalachian Mountain Club, Bayfield Regional Conservancy, Bend Park and Recreation District, Berks County Conservancy, City of Eugene, Colebrook Land Conservancy, Columbia Land Conservancy, Inc., Conservation Northwest, Cornwall Conservation Trust, Eastern Oregon Legacy Lands Fund, Epic-Environmental Protection Information Center, Forterra, Great Peninsula Conservancy, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Jefferson Land Trust, Klamath Forest Alliance, Land Trust Alliance, Land Trust for the Little Tennessee, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, Monadnock Conservancy, Mt. Adams Resource Stewards, Nisqually Land Trust, Northern Forest Center, Open Space Institute, Orange County Land Trust, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Roanoke Electric Cooperative and Subsidiaries, Salisbury Association Land Trust, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, Sharon Land Trust, Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Tar River Land Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, The Greening of Detroit, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, The Wilderness Society, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, Tualatin Hills Park and Recreation District, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Vermont Land Trust, Vermont Woodlands Association, Westchester Land Trust, Western New York Land Conservancy, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Willamalane Park and Recreation District

July 2, 2015

The Honorable Robert Bonnie
Under Secretary for Natural Resources and
Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Under Secretary Bonnie and Chief Tidwell,

As representatives of a broad coalition of conservation and forestry organizations and municipal agencies, we are writing to express our strong support for the U.S. Forest Service's Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP). Since its first grant round in FY 2012, CFP has supported more than two dozen community forest projects across 15 states and territories. However, demand for CFP funding far outstrips its availability, so we urge you to build upon the program's impressive achievements by requesting \$5 million for the program in the agency's Fiscal Year 2017 budget proposal.

CFP is an innovative tool to advance the Administration's goals of supporting local economies, increasing opportunities for Americans to connect with forests in their own communities, and fostering new public-private partnerships. We share the belief that these connections are vital to communities' livability and economic well-being. Since Fiscal Year 2012, CFP has contributed to these important efforts by assisting local communities to secure forests for public recreation, sustainable forestry, and wildlife habitat and water quality preservation.

As you know, CFP provides matching funds to help local government entities, Indian tribes, and non-profit organizations purchase forestlands that are threatened with development and manage them as community forests. The program directly addresses the urgent need to prevent the widespread conversion of private forests to non-forest uses. This threat was highlighted in the U.S. Forest Service report *Private Forests, Public Benefits*, which projected that 57 million acres of America's private forests could experience a substantial increase in housing density by 2030.

In its brief history, CFP has made substantial progress in preserving forests by combining federal and non-federal resources. Indeed, through the latest round of CFP grants, project partners leveraged \$8.3 million in federal funds to secure more than \$30 million in non-federal support. As a result of these

partnerships, more than 11,000 acres of private forestlands have been or soon will be acquired to create new or expand existing community forests. This impressive leveraging ratio demonstrates the willingness of local entities to match federal funding with significant commitments of funding and other resources.

Given the strong interest in the Community Forest Program and its leveraging successes, we urge you to sustain the program's growing momentum by providing greater funding to meet demand. A \$5 million investment in the program as part of the President's FY 2017 budget request will allow the program to benefit even more communities across the nation.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we hope you will give it the highest possible consideration.

Sincerely,

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