

**Written Testimony of the Sustainable Urban Forest Coalition
To the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
March 23, 2016**

The Honorable Ken Calvert
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition (SUFC) represents more than 30 national organizations and corporations who care and advocate for 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 forests and green infrastructure.

Our nation's 138 million acres of urban forests are vital to creating and maintaining healthy, livable communities of all sizes by providing scientifically proven social, economic, and environmental benefits to people living in populated areas. The National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council unveiled its Ten-Year Action Plan to advance urban forests nationwide. A key goal of the plan is to improve urban forest management, maintenance and stewardship. Caring for trees and landscapes in cities and towns creates a substantial demand for greencollar jobs in a sector poised for rapid growth. With a projected 90% of Americans living in urbanized areas by 2050, investing in livable communities needs to happen now.

SUFC is conscious and respectful of the federal budget challenges. It is critical that decision makers are aware that the relatively small investment in our funding requests result in a leveraged positive return through matching funds, preventive measures, and community health and welfare benefits.

USDA Forest Service: State and Private Forestry

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

U&CF plays an integral part in promoting sound stewardship of our nation's urban and community forests and trees. By providing important technical and financial support, U&CF helps cities, suburbs, and towns across the nation enhance tree and forest cover, prepare for storms and other disturbance events, contain threats from native and invasive pests, and maximize the economic, social, and ecological benefits of their tree resources. In FY 2015, U&CF again increased its impact - reaching over 200 million people in over 7,700 communities across 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. As a model federal program, U&CF consistently increases communities served, brings together diverse partners and resources, and shows that federal investment can have huge and lasting impacts on communities of all sizes.

SUFC is very concerned with the significant decrease (16%) in the U&CF program in the President's FY 2017 budget. In testimony before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies, U.S. Forest Service Chief Tidwell attributed the U&CF decrease to the increase in funding for the Landscape Scale Restoration (LSR) program. While U&CF projects have the opportunity to compete for grant funding under LSR, the SUFC

does not support shifting funds from U&CF to LSR. LSR is a complement to the U&CF program, not a replacement. The proposed 16% reduction in U&CF will have negative impacts in states and territories across the country, affecting many local public and private partners and collaborative projects in which federal assistance has been essential. The decrease will erode the capacity that has been developed in cities and towns of all sizes through the technical and financial assistance delivered by state forestry agencies in partnership with the U&CF program. **SUFC recommends the Urban and Community Forestry Program be funded at \$31.3 million in FY 2017.**

- **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 27 community forest projects in cities and towns across 15 states and territories. In the latest round of CFP grants, project partners leveraged \$8.7 million in federal funds to secure \$31.8 million in non-federal funding. As a result of these partnerships, more than 14,000 acres of private forestlands have been or soon will be acquired to create new or expand existing community forests. **SUFC recommends an increase in funds to \$5 million.**

- **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 go to cities. 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. Examples include the emerald ash borer – now killing forest trees from New England to the Great Plains; and the polyphagous and Kuroshio shot hole borers now killing trees in southern California riparian areas. While preventing introductions is the desired approach, it is essential that the Forest Service initiate programs countering these pests as soon as they are detected. Forest Health Management 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 funding of \$303 million for the overall R&D program.

- **Urban 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. 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, SUFC believes, 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 Forest in Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA)**

The SUFC also wishes to call the Subcommittee's attention to our collaborative efforts with the Forest Service to bring 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 has 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, of which urban forests play a significant part, is a cost-effective and resilient approach to stormwater infrastructure needs that provides many community co-benefits: improving water and air quality; reducing a community's infrastructure cost and promoting economic growth. SUFC supports the EPA's goal of strengthening green infrastructure activities by incorporating green infrastructure and enhancing stormwater management. In FY 2016, funding was reduced in the President's Budget but restored by Congress to \$1.39 billion, resulting in only a small reduction for the current fiscal year. In FY 2017, the President's Budget proposes an unprecedented cut to the CWSRF to just \$979.5 million. **SUFC asks the Subcommittee to restore the CWSRF to the enacted FY15 level of \$1.45 billion. SUFC also supports efforts to expand the use of green infrastructure to 20% to meet Clean Water Act goals through the CWSRF.**

- **Urban Waters Federal Partnership**

The Partnership is a unique 13 agency coordinated effort that helps stimulate local economies, create jobs, improve quality of life, and protect health by revitalizing urban waterways and the communities around them, focusing on underserved urban communities of all sizes. Partnership projects serve as a laboratory for developing and implementing innovative approaches to using Federal resources more efficiently and effectively – targeting investments and leveraging local leaders and community partners. **SUFC supports the Urban Waters Federal Partnership, coordinated by the Environmental Protection Agency Office of Water.**

The National Park Service

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

SUFC supports robust funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) as reflected in the President’s FY 2017 budget. 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 supports the President’s FY 2017 request of \$110 million for the state and local assistance program, which includes \$12 million for ORLPP.**

- **Urban Parks Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR)**

The reestablishment of UPARR within the National Parks Service, proposed to be funded through LWCF, is essential to bring nature to the urban communities. These competitive grants focus on engaging and connecting communities, especially young people, to their neighborhood parks through projects that would revitalize and rehabilitate park and recreation opportunities. **SUFC supports the President’s FY 2017 request of \$25 million for the Urban Park and Recreation Recovery Program (UPARR)**

The Fish and Wildlife Service

- **Urban Wildlife Refuges**

With 101 refuges within 25 miles of 250,000 or more people, the Refuge System is a vital component of our urban forests. FWS also engages with 17 urban communities not directly connected to FWS refuges. SUFC agrees that the more engagement of individuals with their surrounding urban forests, the more they will come to understand and appreciate nature in and around their communities. **SUFC supports the Refuge Visitor Service at \$80.38 million with the additional \$5.5 million above FY2016 enacted level to support the Urban Wildlife Refuges.**

Sincerely,

Alliance for Community Trees
American Forests
American Planning Association
American Public Works Association
American Rivers
American Society of Consulting Arborists
American Society of Landscape Architects
Arbor Day Foundation
Bartlett Tree Foundation
California ReLeaf
Center for Chesapeake Communities
Center for Invasive Species Prevention
International Society of Arboriculture
National Assoc. of Clean Water Agencies
National Assoc. of Conservation Districts
National Assoc. of Landscape Professionals
National Assoc. of State Foresters

National Recreation and Parks Association
Outdoor Power Equipment Industry
Society of American Foresters
Society of Municipal Arborists
Student Conservation Association
The Davey Foundation
The Nature Conservancy
Tree Care Industry Association
Trust for Public Lands
Utility Arborist Association
Water Environment Federation