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June 5, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman, Subcommittee on Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
522 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR) has completed its review of the President's Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Budget for the United States Forest Service, entitled, "*A New Foundation for American Greatness.*" Based on this review, NAFSR with the utmost respect, implores you to reject this budget proposal, almost in its entirety. There is nothing about this budget that sets a foundation for greatness with respect to any of America's forests and grasslands. We offer the following specific comments.

With only a handful of exceptions, every program in the Forest Service budget is cut, with a total proposed funding reduction approaching 20 percent. These cuts are across-the-board, including basic stewardship functions on the national forests and grasslands; cooperation with States, Tribes, private landowners, and partners; key programs in forest and rangeland research; and international cooperation and assistance.

The proposed budget contains a disturbing "optical display" that masks deep cuts to basic operations and the resulting consequences for predominantly rural areas of America. For example:

- The Forest Products, budget line item funding level is held level with the enacted FY2016 (which NAFSR supports). However, every other line item necessary to achieve projected forest products outputs and management objectives, is reduced. This renders a viable forest restoration and management program impossible to achieve in light of the degraded forest health conditions on most national forests. From forest planning, to vegetation management, to land ownership management, as only a few examples; programs that directly support the production of forest products, have been reduced.

- Although there are arguably positive aspects to the proposed moving of hazardous fuels treatment to the National Forest System appropriation (NFS), doing so masks a \$20 million proposed reduction in this program. Additionally, the budget continues the debilitating erosion of agency stewardship capacity, by once again, without addressing the underlying problem, proposes to increase wildfire suppression funding consistent with the 10-year average. This continues the resulting degradation in the very programs that will reduce wildfire suppression costs over the long term. The reality is that this budget will further increase the risks of catastrophic wildfire, thus increasing the threats to the livelihoods and health of communities in or adjacent to forested landscapes.
- The proposed reduction of 73 percent within the Capital Improvement and Maintenance Appropriation along with reductions in the Forest Service Recreation Management and Minerals and Geology programs, will dramatically reduce jobs in rural America, prevent access that will support forest restoration, detract from efforts to increase the production of energy from public lands, and further curtail the ability of the American people to enjoy the richness of our public lands.
- Cooperative programs funded within State and Private Forestry, and Forest Landscape Restoration (within NFS) have been very successful in supporting efforts to improve the health and diversity of all of America's public and private lands, as well as international support and assistance worldwide. The President's budget deals a severe blow to the effectiveness of these programs.
- The proposed 11 percent reduction in Forest and Rangeland Research, coupled with the requirement to fully fund the Forest Inventory Analysis program, will result in continuing the decline in the development of science based solutions for such challenges as reducing the spread of invasive species, developing new forest products that will support an expanding building industry, and developing improved community protection approaches to prevent catastrophic wildfire.

In conclusion, NAFSR feels that the President's FY2018 proposed budget for the Forest Service, far from being a formula for achieving "American Greatness," is, if enacted as proposed, an annihilation of the forest and rangeland foundation that supports greatness in rural America. We are confident, that in your deliberations over the FY 2018 Budget, you will reject the President's proposal, and alternatively enact a budget for the Forest Service that recognizes this foundation. We are happy to assist and willingly offer our expertise.

Sincerely,

James L. Caswell

James L. Caswell, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees

(Duplicates of this letter sent to Chairman/Ranking members of respective House and Senate Subcommittees. Copies provided to USDA, USFS, OMB)