

May 5, 2025

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior Environment and Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mike Simpson
Chair, Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior,
Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chellie Pingree
Ranking Member, Appropriations Subcommittee
on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Fiscal Year 2026 Funding for USDA Forest Service Forest Inventory and Analysis Program

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski, Chairman Simpson, and Ranking Members Merkley and Pingree:

The undersigned organizations are strong supporters of the Forest Inventory and Analysis (FIA) program under the USDA Forest Service (Forest Service) Forest and Rangeland Research. For nearly a century, the FIA program – informally referred to as “America’s Forest Census” – has been recognized as a world leader in national-scale forest inventory data collection and analysis. We rely on the inventory, data, and analysis provided by the program, which make up the backbone of scientific knowledge on the current state of the nation’s forests. This critical information is needed to support sound policy and forest management decisions across all land ownerships and is increasingly important for decisions regarding private investment into forests and forest products manufacturing facilities, wildfire preparedness, forest productivity and health.

In recent years, the FIA has struggled to attain the resources necessary to keep up with ever-changing forest landscapes as well as incorporate 21st century technologies to increase data fidelity and programmatic utility. We thank the Committees for sustaining the programmatic funding increase from fiscal year 2023 in the past two funding bills, which has enabled the Forest Service to deliver on many of the sector’s shared priorities, including funding states and cooperators that help deliver the program, fully funding plot collection in interior Alaska, bolstering Timber Products Output (TPO) data collection, expanding analysis of the biomass in our forests and growing remote sensing partnerships.

In fiscal year 2026, we are requesting an increase in FIA program dollars to maintain this level of program delivery, reflecting the ongoing increased costs of delivering the base FIA program. As a result of inflation, the cost of collecting data has increased regardless of who is collecting the data. Federal staff, state cooperators, and private contractors have all seen significant increases in the costs of equipment, vehicles, retaining qualified employees and other critical aspects of the program. With this in mind, **we request that Congress support FIA with no less than \$39.7 million in program dollars for fiscal year 2026.**

Additionally, **of the amount allocated for Salaries and Expenses (S&E) in Forest and Rangeland Research, we urge Congress to explicitly direct \$63.4 million for the FIA program.** We request that in fiscal year 2026 the Committees work with the Forest Service to establish a budget mechanism to allow a clear and dedicated funding level for program S&E as is currently done for programmatic dollars. By explicitly outlining the amount directed toward FIA program S&E, Congress can help improve transparency for all stakeholders and ensure the program is adequately resourced to complete its mission. **Congress should also be aware that \$3.9 million in Forest Service IT funding - pooled and allocated across the agency by the Chief Information Office - is needed to deliver the core FIA program.** All three fund sources are used in tandem by the Forest Service in program delivery, and fully operationalizing the core program work of FIA necessitates increased resources across program, S&E, and IT.

Looking beyond fiscal year 2026, we would like to work with Congress and the Forest Service to realize additional programmatic funding increases with commensurate increases to S&E that are critical to fully delivering on Congressional priorities beyond the core program outlined in the [FIA Strategic Plan](#). This plan includes, enhanced timber products monitoring, enhanced landowner studies, research into land cover and land use change, improved biomass estimates, and urban forest inventory. All these items add immense value to the understanding of our nation's forests but are not possible at current funding levels and are critical given the increasing demand for FIA data both inside and outside of government.

One item in particular we would like to draw the committee's attention to is the growing importance of moving to a nationwide five-year data collection cycle. Currently, funding allows the eastern United States to be measured every seven years, while the west is on a ten-year remeasurement cycle. In light of increasing frequency and severity of forest disturbances such as wildfires and hurricanes, the current cycles are inadequate to capture our rapidly changing forest landscapes. There is also a need to make FIA data more robust and useful for other emerging uses, such as forest sustainability monitoring, wildlife habitat assessments, and much more.

The FIA program has historically utilized Blue Ribbon Panels at pivotal points to steer its development and ensure its alignment with both technological advancements and stakeholder needs. These panels consist of experts who review and recommend methodologies, technologies, and policies to optimize the program's efficacy and relevance. As key FIA stakeholders, we would like to work with Congress and the Forest Service to co-vision a third Blue Ribbon Panel in the coming year, aimed to address contemporary challenges such as integrating advanced remote sensing technologies, refining small area estimation techniques, and restructuring program funding and organizational models to meet modern demands. The insights from these panels are critical in ensuring that the FIA remains at the forefront of forest inventory and analysis technologies and methodologies, and informing Congressional appropriations and authorization decisions.

Given the increasing challenges facing our forests—uncertainty in forest products markets, wildfire, insects and disease, and development pressures—the FIA program is more important now than ever before. We look forward to working with Congress and the Forest Service to continue sustainably growing this program and ensuring accurate and timely inventory of America's forests.

Sincerely,

American Forest and Paper Association
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Wood Council
Arkansas Forestry Association
Arkansas Timber Producers Association
Association of Consulting Foresters
Calforests
Empire State Forest Products Association
Florida Forestry Association
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Forestry Association of South Carolina
Green Diamond Resource Company
Idaho Forest Owners Association
International Paper
L&C Carbon
Louisiana Forestry Association
Lyme Timber
Maryland Forestry Foundation
Maryland Forests Association
Massachusetts Forest Alliance
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Association of State Foresters
National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
National Hardwood Lumber Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
National Woodland Owners Association
Port Blakely
Society of American Foresters
South Carolina Timber Producers Association
Southeastern Wood Producers Association
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
The Nature Conservancy
The Wilderness Society
The Hardwood Federation
Treated Wood Council
Urban and Community Forestry Society
West Virginia Forestry Association