

**STATEMENT of
TOM TIDWELL
CHIEF
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FOREST SERVICE
Before
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
on
Conservation and Forestry: Perspectives on the Past and Future Direction for the 2018
Farm Bill**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee regarding our implementation of Farm Bill programs. Over the past five decades, the Forest Service has received authorization for numerous valuable programs through the Farm Bill. Throughout the 2014 Farm Bill, particularly in the Forestry Title, there are many authorities and provisions that assist the Forest Service in accomplishing our priority work, particularly ecological restoration, support to communities, and reducing the risk of wildfires. Together, these provisions help us demonstrate our commitment to shared stewardship of national forests, while strengthening relationships with states and local communities. I will specifically highlight the accomplishments achieved through the Insect and Disease Designations, the Good Neighbor Authority, and the permanent authorization of the stewardship contracting authority.

The Insect and Disease provisions (Section 8204) set requirements for designating affected National Forest System areas, enabling streamlined environmental review procedures to expedite projects that reduce the risk and extent of, or increase the resilience of the forest to, insect or disease infestations. Based on requests from States, the Forest Service has designated approximately 45.6 million acres across the National Forest System that are already experiencing, or are at risk of experiencing, insect and disease infestations. I also designated an additional 10.1 million acres based on requests from Regional Foresters, bringing the total acres designated to 55.7 million. So far, the Forest Service is using the Farm Bill Insect and Disease provisions for 94 projects spanning 43 National Forests and 19 States.

The Good Neighbor Authority helps the Forest Service work with States to treat more acres. This authority allows the Forest Service to enter into cooperative agreements or contracts with States and Puerto Rico to allow our partners to perform watershed restoration and forest management services on federal lands. To date, the Forest Service has completed 95 Good Neighbor Agreements in 29 States to accomplish a variety of restoration work. This authority is very helpful to the Forest Service, as it improves our access to State agency expertise to accomplish additional acres of restoration work. This State support provides another tool to augment and potentially add to the federal timber sold. This authority also helps us to learn from the States so we apply innovations broadly on public lands.

The Forest Service received permanent authority for stewardship contracting in the 2014 Farm Bill. Stewardship contracting helps the Forest Service achieve our land management goals while promoting closer public-private working relationships by using the value of timber or other

forest products to offset the cost of restoration activities. In Fiscal Year 2016, the Forest Service entered into 225 stewardship contracts and agreements – treating more than 96,000 acres of hazardous fuels in the Wildland-Urban Interface, selling over 718 million board feet of timber, and restoring or improving over 22,000 acres of wildlife habitat.

In addition to the new authorities in the most recent Farm Bill, Congress also provided authorities to work with States and private forest landowners through previous Farm Bills. Over half of the forestland in the United States is in private ownership, and over 90 percent of domestically-produced wood products come from privately owned forests¹. The Forest Service is invested in protecting all of our nation's productive rural working lands from threats, including insect and disease, wildfire, drought, and conversion to non-forest uses. The Forest Stewardship Program was originally authorized through the 1990 Farm Bill. This program allows us to help private forest landowners actively manage their land through funding and technical assistance for management plans. Research has shown us private landowners with management plans are 81 percent more likely to actively manage their lands², leading to local jobs, timber revenue, and economic benefit to the local community. Currently, the Forest Stewardship Program has 25.8 million acres managed under Forest Stewardship plans, and assists 400,000 landowners each year through a variety of technical assistance and education programs. Forest Stewardship plans enable landowners to access a variety of assistance and programs including USDA landowner assistance programs, State tax abatement programs, forest certification, and emerging ecosystem services and renewable energy markets. In addition, as a result of direction in the 2008 Farm Bill, the Forest Service and State Forestry agencies undertook a new effort to develop State Forest Action Plans, which provide an analysis of forest conditions and trends and delineate priority forest landscape areas in each State. State Forest Action plans are practical, long-term plans for investing State, federal, and other resources where they can be most effective in achieving national conservation goals.

An incredible amount of time and effort goes into drafting a new Farm Bill every five years. I appreciate your efforts and look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff as you frame and develop the 2018 Farm Bill.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. The Forest Service stands ready to work with you as you craft the next Farm Bill.

¹ Oswalt, Sonja N.; et al. 2014. Forest Resources of the United States, 2012: a technical document supporting the Forest Service 2015 update of the RPA Assessment. Gen. Tech. Rep. WO-91. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Washington Office. 218 p.

² Butler, B.J.; et al. 2016. USDA Forest Service National Woodland Owner Survey: National, regional, and state statistics for family forest and woodland ownerships with 10+ acres, 2011-2013. Supplemental Data, Table 16: Management Plans. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 39 p. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2737/NRS-RB-99>.