

Agricultural Stewardship Association, American Forests, Appalachian Mountain Club, Berks Conservancy, Columbia Land Conservancy, Inc., Conservation Northwest, Cornwall Conservation Trust, Eastern Forest Partnership, Epic-Environmental Protection Information Center, Hudson Highlands Land Trust, Jefferson Land Trust, Klamath Forest Alliance, Land Trust Alliance, Mt. Adams Resource Stewards, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, Monadnock Conservancy, New Jersey Highlands Coalition, Northern Forest Center, Open Space Institute, Orange County Land Trust, Rangeley Lakes Heritage Trust, Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Salisbury Association Land Trust, San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, Saratoga PLAN, Sharon Land Trust, Sheep Mountain Alliance, Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy, Tar River Land Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, The Greening of Detroit, The Land Trust for the Little Tennessee, The Nature Conservancy, The Trust for Public Land, The Wilderness Society, Torne Valley Preservation Association, Tug Hill Tomorrow Land Trust, Vermont Land Trust, Inc., Vermont Woodlands Association, Westchester Land Trust, Western New York Land Conservancy, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, Wilderness Louisville, Inc., Willamalane Parks and Recreation District

October 23, 2014

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

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1401 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-0003

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). Through the past three years of funding availability, this program has supported more than 20 community forest projects across more than a dozen states. However, because demand for CFP funding far outstrips its availability, we urge you to build upon the program's impressive achievements by requesting \$5 million for the program in the agency's Fiscal Year 2016 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 that these connections are vital to communities' livability and economic well-being. Since Fiscal Year 2012, CFP has contributed to this important effort 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 threatened with development for local ownership and management 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 \$2.3

million in federal funds to secure \$4.9 million in non-federal funding. As a result of these partnerships, more than 1,800 acres of private forestlands will be acquired to create new or expand existing community forests in eight states. 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 impressive 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 2016 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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