Dear Budget Conference Chair Ryan and Budget Conference Vice-Chair Murray,

The Coalition Against Forest Pests consists of non-profit organizations, for-profit corporations, landowners, state agencies and academic scholars who have joined together to improve and enhance the health of our nation's forests. We appreciate the difficulty that comes as Congress responds to the nation’s rising debt, but support for programs at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and USDA Forest Services (USFS) are critical investments that provide economic, social, and environmental benefits.

Our forests and trees across both rural and urban landscapes are the nation’s green infrastructure — providing clean air and water, wildlife habitat, enhanced property values, and renewable energy sources. Furthermore, healthy and sustainable forests drive state and local economies by supporting jobs related to forest products, recreation, and tourism. The U.S. forest products industry employs nearly 900,000 people; it is among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 47 states. Visitors to National Forest System lands generate more than $13 billion of recreation and other related economic activity. Tourism based on fall foliage displays attracts one million tourists who annually generate $1 billion in revenue in New England.

We specifically urge the Budget Conferees to maintain funding for the “Tree and Wood Pests” and “Specialty Crops” budget lines under the USDA APHIS Plant Health program, which supports eradication and control efforts targeting the Asian longhorned beetle, sudden oak death pathogen, emerald ash borer, and other damaging pests.

Equally important is maintaining funding for the Forest Service Forest Health Management (FHM) Program at no less than the FY12 level of $112 million and to provide research for forest invasive species through the Forest Service Research Program (FR&D) at the FY12 level. FHM is the nation’s leading program providing critical assistance to other federal agencies, state agencies, local agencies and private landowners to counter forest pests which have become widespread, including gypsy moth and hemlock woolly adelgid. FR&D provides the scientific foundation for developing effective tools to detect and manage forest pests and the pathways by which they are introduced and spread.

All of the programs have already suffered disproportionate reductions which threaten collaborations and leveraging resources with other federal agencies, states, and numerous academic, non-governmental, and commercial entities. Please find more details on our priorities listed in the attached recommendations. Thank you for your consideration of our request.
Sincerely,

Coalition Against Forest Pests
American Forest Foundation
American Forests
American Nursery and Landscape Association
California Forest Pest Council
Center for Invasive Species & Ecosystem Health
National Alliance for Forest Owners
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of State Foresters
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
National Woodland Owners Association
Society of American Florists
Society of American Foresters
The Nature Conservancy
Vermont Woodlands Association

CC: Rep. Diane Black (TN-6)
    Rep. James Clyburn (SC-6)
    Rep. Tom Cole (OK-4)
    Rep. Nita Lowey (NY-17)
    Rep. Tom Price (GA-6)
    Rep. Chris Van Hollen (MD-8)
    Sen. Kelly Ayotte (NH)
    Sen. Tammy Baldwin (WI)
    Sen. Chris Coons (DE)
    Sen. Mike Crapo (ID)
    Sen. Mike Enzi (WY)
    Sen. Lindsey Graham (S.C.)
    Sen. Chuck Grassley (IA)
    Sen. Ron Johnson (WI)
    Sen. Tim Kaine (VA)
    Sen. Angus King (ME)
    Sen. Jeff Merkley (OR)
    Sen. Bill Nelson (FL)
    Sen. Bernie Sanders (VT)
    Sen. Jeff Sessions (AL)
    Sen. Debbie Stabenow (MI)
    Sen. Pat Toomey (PA)
    Sen. Mark Warner (VA)
    Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (RI)
    Sen. Roger Wicker (MS)
    Sen. Ron Wyden (OR)
Attached please find the Coalition’s detailed appropriations priorities, relevant to both the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, and the Interior Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bills.

**Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations**

*We urge the Budget Conferees to maintain funding for the “Tree and Wood Pests” and “Specialty Crops” lines under the USDA APHIS Plant Health program in order to combat the pest threat.*

APHIS is the agency responsible for preventing pest introductions and countering those pests that evade prevention measures. Since 1975, U.S. imports (excluding petroleum products) have risen almost six times faster than staff to conduct inspections of those imports. The declining resources at APHIS have limited the Agency’s ability to effectively keep plant pests out of the country including the introduction of more than 90 new plant pests in the U.S. since 2009. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to help APHIS strengthen and target its pest-prevention and control programs, including preparation of risk assessments; adopt promptly regulations that effectively clean up pathways of introduction; and increase its capability to detect introductions quickly and respond to them before they become widespread and difficult to control. Effective response, in turn, depends upon capacity to develop and test exclusion, detection, and pest management methods.

Funding for the “Tree and Wood Pests” and “Specialty Crops” programs are essential to protecting America’s irreplaceable rural and urban forests from the rising tide of tree-killing pests. Forested landscapes cover approximately one-third of the total land area of the United States including 100 million acres in urban environments. Every American benefits from forests, whether in the form of wood products for construction or paper, neighborhood amenities, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, clean water and air, and even our spiritual well-being.

Municipal governments across the country are spending more than $1.7 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by these pests. Homeowners are spending $1 billion to remove and replace trees on their properties; they are absorbing an additional $1.5 billion in reduced property values.

Over the past decade, 19 new wood-boring pests have been detected in the U.S. Despite the rising risk, APHIS’ ability to counter these pests – funded by the “Tree and Wood Pest” spending line – was cut by more than one-quarter from FY11 to FY12. A new pest that poses a significant threat to trees arrives, on average, every two to three years. Additional cuts further limit the ability of APHIS to reduce the level of damages caused by the growing number of such pests.

The principal program funded under the “Tree and Wood Pest” account is eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle. It is imperative to complete eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle at known outbreak sites, and to continue expanded detection programs to ensure that it is not established at additional sites. The Asian longhorned beetle kills trees in 15 botanical families—especially maples and birches which constitute much of the forest reaching from Maine to Minnesota and urban trees worth an estimated $600 billion. We cannot afford to let this beetle become established in North America, so APHIS must continue improving its detection and eradication tools.
Funds are also needed to support APHIS programs targeting firewood as a major pathway by which the emerald ash borer and other pests are spread to new areas. For example, significant numbers of ash trees are outside the area currently infested by the emerald ash borer, especially in cities and towns of the Great Plains, West, and South. Reducing APHIS’ ‘slow the spread’ effort will expose municipal governments and property owners in these areas to millions of dollars in costs for tree removal. Addressing firewood will also counter further spread of the goldspotted oak borer, which has killed 80,000 oak trees in less than 15 years in southern California. The insect threatens oaks throughout California, including in greater Los Angeles and in Yosemite National Park. APHIS should establish a quarantine and evaluate whether oak trees in the Southeast are at risk.

Other impending losses, including from the Thousand Cankers Disease, are even greater. Thousand Cankers Disease threatens black walnut across the East; the value of walnut growing stock is estimated to be $539 billion. APHIS must have sufficient funds to help states manage this pest and to support ongoing efforts to develop detection traps, biological controls, and other tools aimed at reducing the damage it causes.

Funding for the “Specialty Crops” program is essential to improving the ability of APHIS to curtail spread of the sudden oak death (SOD) pathogen through interstate movement of infected plants. This year, despite eight years of regulation, 17 nurseries still had SOD-infected plants. APHIS must adopt more effective measures to ensure that plants shipped to vulnerable areas, such as the Southeast, are not carrying this pathogen. APHIS should also evaluate the threat to oaks, maples, willows, and sweetgum trees across the country posed by the polyphagous shot hole borer and the fungus it carries. At present, this pest complex is found in Los Angeles County, California.

These vitally important programs are leveraged by collaborations with other federal agencies, states, and numerous academic, non-governmental, and commercial entities. If reduced funding hampers these efforts, forests across the Nation will be at increased risk from Asian longhorned beetle, emerald ash borer, sudden oak death, Thousand Cankers Disease of walnut, laurel wilt, and a host of other wood-inhabiting pests.

**Interior Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations**

We urge the Budget Conferees to provide funding for the Forest Service Forest Health Management (FHM) Program to no less than the FY12 level of $112 million (of which $48 million was directed to cooperative lands) and to provide research for forest invasive species through the Forest Service Research Program to the FY12 level.

Close to 500 species of tree-damaging pests from other countries have become established in the country, and a new one is introduced, on average, every 2 to 3 years. At least 28 new tree-killing pests have been detected in the United States in just the last decade. Some of these are capable of causing enormous damage. For instance, Thousand Cankers Disease threatens black walnut trees across the East; the value of walnut growing stock is estimated to be $539 billion.

Already, municipal governments across the country are spending more than $2 billion each year to remove trees on city property killed by non-native pests. Homeowners are spending $1 billion to remove and replace trees on their properties and are absorbing an additional $1.5 billion in reduced property values.
The USFS FHM & Research programs provide critical resources supporting efforts to prevent, contain, and eradicate dangerous pests and pathogens affecting trees and forests. USFS funding for many of these vital pest programs has been cut severely:

- Asian longhorned beetle, cut by 68% from FY11 to FY12
- Sudden oak death, cut by 53% from FY11 to FY12
- Emerald ash borer, cut by 36% from FY11 to FY12
- Hemlock woolly adelgid, cut by 22% from FY11 to FY12

These programs suffered further cuts in FY13; the emerald ash borer program was cut by another 32%, reducing it to only 42% of its 2011 level. In the meantime, the APHIS EAB program has shrunk 74% - from $37.2 million to just $9.7 million.

In FY 2012, the FHM Program helped combat native and invasive pests on over 351,000 acres of Federal lands and over 615,000 acres of Cooperative lands. While these numbers represent a vital component of our efforts to protect the nation’s forests and trees, they also represent the real consequences of reductions in funding—with nearly 150,000 fewer acres treated on Cooperative lands in FY 2012 compared to acres treated in FY11. Further, FHM leads the federal government’s efforts to counter forest pests which have become widespread, including gypsy moth, hemlock woolly adelgid, white pine blister rust, Port-Orford-cedar root disease, Thousand Cankers Disease, oak wilt, and others. Any further cuts to this program will necessitate deeper reductions in support for communities already facing outbreaks and expose more of the nation’s forests and trees to the pests’ devastating and costly effects.

The USFS Research and Development Program provides the science to help manage invasive species in urban and rural forests. Forest Service Research (R&D) provides the scientific foundation for developing effective tools to detect and manage forest pests and the pathways by which they are introduced and spread. We consider it vitally important to conduct research aimed at improving detection and control methods for the emerald ash borer, hemlock woolly adelgid, sudden oak death, Thousand Cankers Disease, goldspotted oak borer and other non-native forests pests and diseases. USFS research scientists have had the leading role in developing detection traps & evaluating treatments that make walnut lumber safe to continue moving in commerce.

We ask your support to direct Forest Service research funding targeted at improving detection and control of these deadly pests and diseases. The importance of maintaining funding for USFS FHP & R&D programs on these pests is demonstrated by a brief description of the threats they pose:

- The Asian longhorned beetle kills trees in 15 botanical families—especially maples and birches which constitute much of the forest reaching from Maine to Minnesota and urban trees worth an estimated $600 billion.
- Emerald ash borer occupies more than 200,000 square miles in 21 states. More than 200 million ash trees in the Plains States and additional trees in the South are at risk to this pest. Homeowners and municipalities collectively will pay more than $10 billion over the next 10 years to remove dead ash trees that would otherwise fall and cause property damage or even loss of life.
• Hemlock woolly adelgid has killed up to 90% of hemlock trees in the Appalachians from Georgia to Massachusetts. Loss of hemlock groves threatens unique ecosystems and watersheds.
• Goldspotted oak borer has killed up to 80,000 California live oak and black oak trees in San Diego County in less than 15 years. The insect threatens oaks throughout California, including close to 300,000 oak trees growing in greater Los Angeles and trees in Yosemite Valley.
• Sudden oak death affects 143 different plant species and continues to spread in California’s 14 impacted counties as well as Curry County, Oregon. In 2012 alone, nearly 400,000 trees were lost to sudden oak death in California.

In a time when America’s forests and trees faces significant threats regarding their present and long-term health, the USFS and APHIS must be provided with adequate funds to support these key programs. Accordingly, we urge you to provide sufficient funding for the previously mentioned line items. We would be pleased to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time and consideration of this important request.