Written Public Testimony from Members of the Coalition Against Forest Pests:

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AmericanHort (American Horticulture Industry Association)
National Alliance of Forest Owners,
National Association of State Foresters, National Network of Forest Practitioners,
National Wild Turkey Federation, National Woodland Owners Association,
Oregon Association of Nurseries, Society of American Florists, The Nature Conservancy,
Tree Care Industry Association,
Vermont Woodlands Association

Submitted to the House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies
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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 our nation’s efforts to address this critical threat to our forests. We write today in support of funding for programs at the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) that help keep the nation’s forests healthy by preventing introduction and spread of invasive pests. Specifically, we ask the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies to maintain the Fiscal Year 2014 funding level ($54 million) for the “Tree and Wood Pests” line under the USDA APHIS Plant Health program and to continue to support the “Specialty Crops” budget account.
Funding through the “Tree and Wood Pests” budget account supports eradication and control efforts targeting the Asian longhorned beetle and other wood-boring insects. Now is not the time to reduce this critical program, as America’s rural and urban forests are at risk to 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 the wood products, neighborhood amenities, wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, clean water and air, and spiritual well-being that forests provide. Furthermore, the U.S. forest products industry employs nearly 900,000 people; it is among the top 10 manufacturing sector employers in 47 states. Jobs associated with production of non-wood forest products are estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

In addition, 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.

Despite the increasing risk and impacts, funding for the “Tree and Wood Pest” account has been reduced by nearly 30 percent since FY11. The President’s budget now proposes cutting the program further, from $54 million to $45 million. When added to the reductions in previous years, this proposed cut of $9 million would result in a 40 percent decrease in funding since FY11. Even at current funding levels for this budget account, APHIS cannot maintain efforts to curtail spread of insects that are already established, much less respond to new threats.

Nearly 25 million shipping containers enter the country every year. Scientists estimate that the crates, pallets, and other packaging material in 13,000 of these containers are infested by damaging insects. Once inside the country, these pests can spread to nearby trees, where
they can wreak havoc. And many have. Nineteen species of non-native wood-boring and bark insects have been detected for the first time in the United States over just the past decade.

The “Tree and Wood Pests” account has focused in recent years on eradication of the Asian longhorned beetle. 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, as well as urban trees worth an estimated $600 billion. The magnitude of the threat justifies this large eradication program, which is now in its 18th year. While eradication efforts must continue in Massachusetts and Ohio, APHIS must now expand its program on Long Island, New York, because the outbreak there has been determined to be larger than previously thought. Sufficiently funded eradication efforts have proven successful saving states, municipalities, electric utilities, and private property owners millions in avoided mitigation costs around public safety, electric reliability, and property owner liability from dead or dying trees.

It is important that APHIS also have sufficient resources to protect the country from more recently discovered wood-boring insects. Thousand cankers disease threatens black walnut across the East; the value of walnut growing stock is estimated to be $539 billion. The goldspotted oak borer has killed 80,000 trees in little more than a dozen years; it threatens oak trees throughout California. The polyphagous shot hole borer is known to infest more than 200 species of trees – trees which grow in woodlands and towns across the country. APHIS should adopt programs aimed at preventing its introduction to areas outside southern California.

Finally, slowing spread of the emerald ash borer outbreak remains worthwhile because this insect threatens more than 200 million ash trees growing in regions outside the currently infested area, especially in cities and towns of the Great Plains, West, and South.
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.

We ask the Subcommittee to continue to support the “Specialty Crops” budget account. Approximately $5 million from this account funds APHIS’ program to stop spread of the sudden oak death pathogen via trade in nursery plants. APHIS has recently redesigned its sudden oak death regulatory program in ways the agency expects will provide protection at lower cost.

Since 1975, U.S. imports (excluding petroleum products) have risen almost six times faster than APHIS staff capability to conduct inspections of those imports. In just three years, from 2009 to 2012, more than 90 new plant pests have been detected in the United States. We look forward to working with the Subcommittee to further the goal of funding strong pest-prevention and control programs, including preparation of risk assessments; prompt adoption of regulations that effectively clean up pathways of introduction; and increasing 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. All of these depend on an adequate budget.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to share testimony as the subcommittee prepares a Fiscal Year 2015 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

For further information, please contact Faith Campbell, Senior Policy Representative in U.S. Government Relations, The Nature Conservancy, at fcampbell@tnc.org or 703-841-4881.