December 18, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

With the UNFCCC climate talks complete, we, the undersigned organizations, members of the Forest Climate Working Group, are writing to urge you to include a strong role for U.S. forests, including working forests and the harvested wood products they generate, as you work to achieve the greenhouse gas emissions contributions agreed to in Paris.

All U.S. commitments both international and domestic, for reducing economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions are based on the assumption that U.S. forests will continue to sequester roughly 13% of our annual greenhouse gas emissions. Put in perspective, U.S. forest annual carbon storage almost equals the reduction goals that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency hopes to achieve in its Clean Power Plan for electric power plants. Healthy, domestic forests are part of the U.S. contribution to the climate solution.

Significantly more work is needed to ensure that forests and forest products can continue to provide climate mitigation benefits. With appropriate measures, U.S. forests have the potential to contribute even more towards mitigating climate change.

Recent U.S. government reports and projections (www.Wear and Coulston 2015: http://www.nature.com/articles/srep16518#abstract) indicate that U.S. forest carbon sequestration could flatten and eventually decline without policies in place to maintain and enhance forest land use and forest health. The 2010 U.S. Forest Service Resource Planning Assessment and the National Climate Assessment Forest Sector Report attribute these potential carbon sink changes to urban development pressure and stressors such as fire, pests, disease and drought that will worsen with climate change.

To respond to both this opportunity and challenge, we believe a comprehensive suite of policy solutions is needed at both the federal and state levels that will enable U.S. forests to significantly complement the emissions reductions goals in the recent Clean Power Plan and boost the implementation of the USDA Climate Smart Agriculture and Forestry Building Blocks.

Our policy recommendations, (https://www.forestfoundation.org/read-our-recommendations), are founded on the following building blocks:

(1) Provide sound data and science,
(2) Promote forest products to extend carbon storage, the carbon footprint of building materials, and provide incentives to keep forests as forests,

(3) Restore and manage private forests with the help of conservation programs and tax incentives,

(4) Retain forests through economic incentives and conservation easements,

(5) Encourage landscape-scale conservation public/private partnerships, and

(6) Expand the creation and care of urban forests for improved resilience, pollution management, and adaptation to climate-driven disasters.

In an effort to continue to advance these policy solutions, today we are sharing with you and with U.S. States across the nation, our new state policy toolkit, "State Government Toolkit: Tapping U.S. Forests to Mitigate Climate Change while Improving the Economy," (www.forestfoundation.org/state-policy-recommendations-forest-carbon). Our toolkit provides detailed guidance for State policy makers regarding opportunities to recognize, incentivize, and support forest carbon as part of any State’s overall climate strategy.

U.S. forest and forest products have a significant role to play in meeting the emissions contributions you’ve identified internationally and domestically. We urge you to support the powerful role for U.S. forests in achieving these contributions. We and the tens of millions of U.S. forest landowners and managers stand ready to be part of the global effort and the American contribution to mobilize our forests to respond to climate change.

Thank you for your consideration.

American Bird Conservancy
American Forests
CarbonVerde, LLC
Forest Trends
Hancock Natural Resource Group
L&G Carbon, LLC
Lyme Timber
Montana Tree Farm System
National Association of University Forest Resource Programs
Oregon Small Woodlands Association
Sonen Capital
Sustainable Forestry Initiative
American Forest Foundation
California Forestry Association
Forest Stewards Guild
Green Diamond Resource Company
Hardwood Federation
Louisiana Forestry Association
Michigan Forest Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
New England Forestry Foundation
Society of American Foresters
Spatial Informatics Group-Natural Assets Laboratory
The Trust for Public Land