



**Statement of Jad Daley, President & CEO, American Forests,
Before the National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee
of the House Committee on Natural Resources
Regarding H.R. 2049, the REPLANT Act of 2021
July 13, 2021**

Thank you, Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today in enthusiastic support of H.R. 2049, the “Repairing Existing Public Land by Adding Necessary Trees Act” (the “REPLANT Act”).

I am President and CEO of American Forests, the oldest national nonprofit conservation organization in the United States. Since our founding in 1875, we have been the pathfinders for creating healthy forests from coast to coast. We are deeply engaged in advocating for policies from rallying forest advocates to establish the U.S. Forest Service at the turn of the last century, to championing the original Civilian Conservation Corps, to the more recent decade-long campaign to provide stable funding for preventing and fighting forest fires. Now we are focused on building a reforestation movement in America, from cities to rural landscapes.

One common thread that runs through these diverse initiatives is their common-sense, win-win approach to real-world challenges facing our forests, the natural infrastructure and public services they provide, and the communities that depend on them. Maintaining these forest values is essential for a host of reasons of which the Committee is well aware, ranging from the essential role forests play in providing wood products, jobs, and economic vitality for rural communities, to the water supplies they safeguard, to the vast stores of carbon they sequester, to the incomparable fish and wildlife they support and the outdoor recreation opportunities they offer.

The REPLANT Act falls solidly into that tradition of pragmatism and effective forest policy. It is a simple, logical, long-overdue solution to a longstanding crisis. Recovery funding for national forests ravaged by fire, drought, disease and other stressors has utterly failed to keep pace with losses and has created a huge backlog of reforestation need now estimated by the US Forest Service at 4 million acres. That backlog worsens dramatically each year, with the 2020 fire season adding roughly 1 million acres of needed reforestation to the total. The cost of inaction continues to mount due to this ever-increasing footprint of damage, threatening the natural benefits that national forests provide to surrounding communities.

There simply is no time to lose in the effort to address the increasing backlog of reforestation need and infrastructure loss on our national forests. We therefore are extremely grateful to Congressmen Jimmy Panetta and Mike Simpson, and numerous bipartisan

cosponsors who are well-represented on both sides of the dais on this Committee and elsewhere in Congress, for proposing this urgently needed legislation, and to Chairman Neguse for the Subcommittee's consideration of it today. We also appreciate the broad support of our private sector and nonprofit colleagues – including corporate leaders like Salesforce and Mastercard; REI, Inc. and a host of outdoor industry partners; recreation and wildlife organizations from the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation and the Ruffed Grouse Society and Mule Deer Foundation; and broad representation from the forestry and conservation community including The Nature Conservancy, the National Association of State Foresters, the Bipartisan Policy Center, Trust for Public Land, and the National Audubon Society.

For reasons outlined below, we ask Congress to advance the REPLANT Act to the President's desk without delay.

Our National Forests are Critical – and Critically Threatened -- Natural Infrastructure

It would be difficult to overstate the vital importance of our national forests in meeting a broad spectrum of resource and natural infrastructure needs for a broad cross-section of American communities and for our nation as a whole. Consider the following:

- As a proven natural climate solution, our forests are a necessary and integral part of any meaningful response to the challenges posed by a changing climate. America's forests and wood products capture and sequester ~15 percent of the carbon emissions we produce, and targeted reforestation and other forestry actions have the potential to nearly double this benefit. On our national forests alone—over 193 million acres within 154 national forests and 20 national grasslands across the nation, including some of America's most important and carbon-efficient landscapes—the sequestration value of these lands is immense and irreplaceable.
- Our nation's forests also represent a vast and sometimes underappreciated source of drinking water for communities across the country. Over 55 percent of us (about 180 million Americans) rely on forests to supply and filter our water. The U.S. Forest Service ranks as the #1 supplier of fresh water to American households, with 66 million of us, in over 3,400 communities spread across 33 states, drawing our water from national forest lands. The value of this natural infrastructure, in light of the formidable costs of manmade storage, filtration, and treatment alternatives, is simply incalculable.
- America's forests have long served as a source of economic activity and employment with nearly 3 million jobs in the forest sector. Reforesting landscapes also advances socio-economic benefits. For instance, every \$1 million invested in rural reforestation in North America supports as many as 40 jobs across the reforestation pipeline from seed collection and storage, to tree seedling production in nurseries, to site preparation for planting, to post-planting maintenance and monitoring. Growing the reforestation pipeline was a highly effective tool for economic recovery in the New Deal era with the original Civilian Conservation Corps and is poised to yet again factor significantly in the current need for economic recovery. Much of this economic production and many of these jobs are associated with our national forests and the local communities they

serve, not only related to traditional timber-related activities, but also stemming from reforestation, forest restoration, and enhancement of the natural infrastructure services our forests provide.

- As we all saw during the pandemic, just as we have seen consistently in the pre-COVID past, reliance on national forests for the incomparable high-quality outdoor recreation they afford has grown steeply and steadily year after year. That growth is reflected in Forest Service visitor statistics that show a remarkable 168 million recreation visits to national forests and grasslands in 2020. For many hunters, anglers, hikers, river enthusiasts and others, national forests provide the best accessible opportunity to enjoy America's great outdoors. As a crucial component of our outdoor recreation infrastructure, national forests also represent a significant contributor to the \$887 billion annual outdoor recreation economy.
- Natural communities, including diverse populations of fish, wildlife, and plants, also are highly dependent of the overall amount, integrity, and ecological function of our forests. The national forests are habitat for a vast array of game and nongame species – including sensitive and listed species, some of which are found nowhere else on earth – and the millions of miles of waterways they encompass are crucial to fish and other species far beyond forest boundaries, making these lands a critical link in the web of life.

The accelerated rate of forest losses due to wildfire and other unplanned events make it impossible for us to take these essential assets for granted. Last year's wildfire season was one of the worst in our nation's history, with over 10.1 million acres burned. As shocking as those figures and the associated damages are, it may still get worse. In three of the past six years, wildfires have laid claim to more than 10 million acres, a staggering threshold. Sadly, the 2021 season, exacerbated by widespread Western drought conditions, is widely expected to continue and potentially expand this trend. One terrifying statistic: the number of large wildfires sparked so far this year – over 29,000 – is the highest number recorded through June of any year since at least 1911.

The enormity of this challenge to private and public forests, including national forests, lies not only in these stark statistics but also in the very different character of wildfires today versus just a few years ago. Fires are burning far hotter and more intensely than ever before, leaving burn scars and scorched soils that cannot possibly regenerate without reforestation intervention. Moreover, the large-acreage nature of many of these fires, including unprecedented large fire "complexes", deprive these areas of the seed-source trees needed for natural regeneration, leaving vast swaths of deforested land with no hope of natural regeneration recovery.



Sugar pine seed orchard, Klamath National Forest decimated by Slater Fire, 2020. Credit: USDA Forest Service

It also leaves them susceptible to transition to non-forested ecosystems, and to being overrun by invasive species. Without the nursery capacity to replace lost trees, the programmatic resources to reforest with the right species in the right places, and the requisite site treatment to ensure successful reforestation and restored ecological processes, the natural infrastructure and climate solutions we need these forests to provide are permanently lost. Dozens of federal and state nurseries have closed in the last two decades; the Reforestation Trust Fund can also be used to support much needed nursery capacity.

Catastrophic fire of course is not the only challenge weakening the resilience, hindering the natural benefits and functional acreage of our forests. Disease outbreaks, infestations, and hurricanes and other storms, including those exacerbated by drought and other climate impacts, have claimed large expanses of previously healthy forest in both the eastern and western U.S. These losses can have myriad economic impacts far beyond the forests themselves. Take for instance the uniquely American bourbon industry, and its distillers' reliance on American white oak for barrel aging. Tens of thousands of jobs and billions in revenue depend upon reforestation of a tree in crisis due to changes in forest disturbances, climate threats, and forest losses.

Also at irremediable risk is the biodiversity that characterizes some of our most vital forest landscapes, including the rapidly declining whitebark pine forests of the Northern Rockies and other western summits. Other opportunities exist to harness the REPLANT Act to restore former mine lands into forested carbon sequestering powerhouses, and to secure and enhance globally significant biodiversity in longleaf pine forests.

Left unaddressed, damage from wildfire and other causes begets additional damage, with financial and community costs that escalate exponentially. Without proper treatment and reforestation, tree mortality in deteriorated and unstable areas continues. Moreover, the damage wrought by landslides and mudslides on ravaged landscapes following catastrophic tree loss does not merely claim additional trees; it has dire and potentially devastating consequences to communities below when major transportation corridors are shut down by debris (as was Colorado's I-70 just a few weeks ago, and California's Highway 1 after last fire season), and when water supplies are fouled by excessive sediment flows.

The REPLANT Act – Making Up for Lost Time

The good news is that programmatic resources, including the Reforestation Trust Fund established in 1980 (under 16 U.S.C. 1606a), provide a mechanism for reforestation of our national forests, including those impacted by cataclysmic losses and threats. The bad news is that available financial resources under existing law fall far, far short of even beginning to address this accelerating crisis, instead leaving an ever-growing backlog of reforestation need, natural infrastructure damage, and community risk. Enactment of the REPLANT Act is an obvious, urgently needed answer to this spiraling challenge.

By 2019, The U.S. Forest Service had documented a National Forest System reforestation backlog of over 1.3 million acres. More recently, the Forest Service testified before the Senate that reforestation needs beyond that earlier planning have expanded to an estimated total of 4 million acres. At current funding levels, the Service further testified that it is able to address only six percent (6%) of post-wildfire replanting needs each year, resulting in massive annual increases in the reforestation backlog. Data from American Forests and The Nature Conservancy suggest that the backlog could be far greater still; our estimates of reforestation opportunity on U.S. Forest Service lands suggests more than 7 million acres.

The Reforestation Trust Fund (RTF) is based on a simple, elegant idea: it captures an existing, reliable, forest-related revenue stream, comprising a discrete set of wood product tariffs, and dedicates them to national forest reforestation needs. That unassailable logic, however, is undermined by a now-antiquated and counterproductive provision of the 1980 law. Since that time, reforestation needs as described above have increased exponentially, but accumulation of those annual tariffs into RTF was capped at \$30 million per year. The reforestation buying power of that \$30 million has eroded significantly over the past 41 years; had the cap merely been indexed for inflation, nearly \$100 million would flow into the RTF. Moreover, tariff revenues have increased even further beyond that threshold, averaging \$123 million per year from 2010-2019. Unfortunately, the \$30 million cap has starved the RTF and the communities and natural infrastructure it serves of the additional benefit of those increases. Meanwhile, the Forest Service tells us that reforestation needs would now cost \$183 million each year over the next decade to address.

The REPLANT Act corrects this imbalance and updates the RTF by eliminating the outdated RTF cap and fully utilizing those existing qualified tariffs – with absolutely no tariff increases and no taxpayer dollars. The resulting increased level of funding will allow for meaningful progress to meet annual current reforestation needs and to chip away at the backlog, planting an estimated 1.2 billion trees and reforesting 4 million acres over the next decade. Under the bill, the Forest Service will develop and implement a prioritized strategy for eliminating the reforestation backlog and meeting reforestation needs in the future.

The associated benefits of that decisive reforestation response will be far-reaching and incredibly consequential. The trees planted each decade will capture almost 758 million metric tons of carbon dioxide over their lifetimes, sequestering the carbon equivalent of 85.3 billion gallons of combusted gasoline. That sustained reforestation effort, including the establishment of much-needed additional nursery capacity, will bring an estimated 49,000 new jobs to local communities each decade.

The healthy, climate-smart forest landscapes rising from the ashes of wildfire, reclaimed from ruinous infestations, and regrown after ravaging climate and weather impacts will minimize serious and immediate resilience risks to communities, roads, and water supplies, while enhancing the manifold natural infrastructure and economic power of our forests. Moreover, the tools provided in this bill will allow for a science-based, 21st century, resilience-focused, prioritized reforestation with techniques including cluster planting and adapted species selection that truly re-establish biological values and ecological services. As a result, future forests will be more resilient to climate change, thanks to climate-adaptive reforestation built around tree species more likely to thrive in hotter, drier climates and innovative planting design and maintenance strategies to help forests better adapt to severe fire and drought.

Private partners are eager and ready to engage. The US Chapter of 1t.org has 55 partner organizations that over the past year have pledged to plant and conserve 50 billion trees globally by 2030. Already, the U.S. Forest Service is drawing in millions of private dollars each year from partners like these to help fund reforestation, and this is rising rapidly. But the lack of enough Forest Service projects this year, due to ongoing staffing and funding shortfalls, meant the agency has not been able to accept all of the private sector match contributions being offered. With the increased funding made possible by REPLANT, all of these growing private sector dollars could be used. We cannot afford to let this private sector support go to waste.

The REPLANT Act offers Congress the opportunity to repair ongoing and worsening damage to our public lands, realize the diverse and essential benefits of reforestation, and mitigate risks and preclude further damage to local communities and economies. American Forests deeply appreciates the leadership shown by Representatives Panetta and Simpson and their REPLANT cosponsors, including Chairman Neguse and fellow House Natural Resource Committee members Debbie Dingell, Doug LaMalfa, and Paul Tonko, and we stand ready to help in any way possible to advance this critical bill for the future of America's national forests.