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February 18, 2024

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

Via email

Dear Under Secretary Wilkes:

One of the core beliefs of the National Association of Forest Service Retirees is the importance of addressing emerging national issues professionally and deliberately with facts and science. For the past five years, NAFSR has focused attention on climate change and its effects on both public and private forests, grasslands, and communities.

Over the past year, we have seen interest in forest carbon growing—both nationally and within USDA. Recent executive orders have highlighted the issue. Further, Secretary Vilsack's Memorandum 1077 of June 23, 2022, directed you and Chief Moore to take a series of immediate and near-term actions to build carbon stewardship and climate resilience in our national forests. NAFSR applauded this new direction and lent our support by issuing a position statement on climate change and a supporting science statement (our letter of February 14, 2023).

As we witnessed the increasing interest in forest carbon, I asked the NAFSR Climate Committee to prepare a position statement on forest carbon. At our board meeting last week on February 6, 2024, we approved the position statement, "*Forest Carbon Stewardship Principles for Our Nation's Forests*," and a companion science statement, "*Science to Support Principles for Carbon Stewardship*

in the Nation's Forests." Both documents are the work of a team of eight retirees who have led and conducted research on climate change and carbon for decades.

The position statement supports the Forest Service in developing a strong leadership role in defining the concept of carbon stewardship for all lands. The agency has developed a set of five actionable, science-based carbon stewardship principles that we believe should be translated into goals, baselines, and performance measures useful by all forest sector stakeholders.

We believe that achieving long-term resilience for carbon across the entire forest sector requires a consistent coordinated approach by everyone. Therefore, we also applaud the Memorandum of Agreement between the Forest Service and partners signed on February 9, 2024, to develop a digital platform that will provide high-quality forest carbon information to landowners and other forest sector partners. The NAFSR science statement highlights priorities we believe that require additional investments to develop forest carbon information essential to the success of the MoA.

NAFSR commends the position statement and supporting science statement to you and encourages you to use its key points to help shape policies and programs and secure the funding needed to help create more acres of resilient forests that survive and thrive to benefit future generations.

Sincerely,

Steve Ellis

Steve Ellis, Chair
National Association of Forest Service Retirees (NAFSR)

Attachments (2)

Cc:
Deputy Under Secretary for NRE
Chief