

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 15, 2024

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
Chair
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment, and
Related Agencies
United States Senate
Washington DC, 20510

Dear Chair Merkley and Ranking Member Murkowski,

We write to express our strong support for the Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (Community Forest Program or CFP), authorized by Congress in the 2008 Farm Bill (Section 8002 of Public Law 110-246). We respectfully request that you appropriate \$12.5 million for the program in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Interior and Environment Appropriations bill.

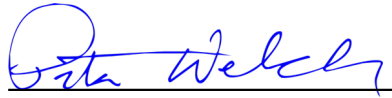
The Community Forest Program helps local government entities, tribes, and non-profit conservation organizations purchase forestland for local ownership and management. This program leverages precious federal dollars by awarding 50-50 matching grants through a nationally competitive process administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Over the past ten years, Congress has appropriated \$35.5 million to the program and received supplemental appropriations of \$0.8 million in FY19. The U.S. Forest Service has awarded funding to a total of 100 projects in 28 states, 1 territory, and 3 tribes. In FY 2024, Congress appropriated \$5.5 million to the program. However, the U.S. Forest Service received 28 project requests totaling more than \$12 million, to conserve more than 10,000 acres. In addition to the federal funding, these community forest projects leverage private and local funding to double the impact of CFP grants.

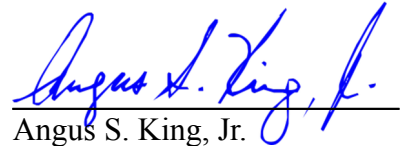
The Community Forest Program prioritizes projects that meet locally identified community needs for natural resource protection, forest-based economic development, and public access. Local residents play the lead role in conservation, stewardship, and governance of any lands acquired with CFP funds. This model of locally led conservation has proven popular and effective across America. It is also a program that contributes to national objectives to fight climate change through forested landscapes.

We respectfully request that the Senate Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee provide \$12.5 million for the CFP in FY 2025. Thank you for your consideration of this request, and please do not hesitate to contact any of us for more information.

Sincerely,



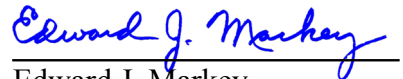
Peter Welch
United States Senator



Angus S. King, Jr.
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator