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Written Testimony of Debra Huff,

Executive Director, Michigan Forest Association

For the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry

Field Hearing on the 2018 Farm Bill - *Growing Jobs and Economic Opportunity: Perspectives on the 2018 Farm Bill from Michigan*

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Senator Stabenow and Committee Members,

On behalf of hundreds of forest owners, foresters, conservationists, and Michigan citizens who love our forests, represented by the Michigan Forest Association, we ask for your continued support of forest priorities in the upcoming Farm Bill reauthorization.

The Michigan Forest Association (MFA) is a non-profit organization, created over 40 years ago to help private forest owners understand and sustainably manage their forests. Michigan has more forest land than any other state in the Northeast or Midwest. According to the Michigan Forests 2014 report, Michigan wood product and paper industries directly employ nearly 35,000 people and have an output of approximately 10 billion dollars annually. Additional Michigan jobs and economic output are found in logging, transportation, recreation, hunting, tourism, furniture and more. And small, family forest owners as a group, own 45% of the forest land in Michigan (9.1 million of 20.3 million acres)! Michigan forests and family forest owners are important to growing jobs and providing economic opportunity in Michigan.

These forests support our rural economies, while also helping maintain the clean air and water that Michigan is known for. Wildlife habitat, recreational and tourism opportunities also abound in the forests of Michigan. The Farm Bills of the past have helped family forest owners manage their lands, and keep them vigorous and healthy.

Farm Bill funding through the Forestry Incentives program and the Stewardship Incentives program helped forest owners implement forestry practices and obtain technical assistance that was needed. These programs were replaced by subsequent Farm Bill programs like the Forest Land Enhancement program in the 2002 Farm Bill, which provided $100 million in funding to forest owners in recognition of the contribution to the American economy that forests provided. However, 40- 50% of those funds were diverted to wildfire control and the funding for this program ceased to be reauthorized in 2007. This illustrates the need to safeguard funds for forestry programs.

With the forthcoming 2018 Farm Bill, MFA believes that forests can be supported in the following actions:

* Support funding of sustainable forest practices through the NRCS programs – notably through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship program. We urge the inclusion of healthy forest systems as a resource priority and a designated percentage of available EQIP funds be reserved for forest practices. We recognize that healthy forests often mean good wildlife habitat, and that they overlap as resource concerns. Healthy forests also mean that soils will erode less, and that air will be cleaner. However, the goals of those resource concerns do not necessarily ensure that there will be healthy forest system funding, and the inclusion of healthy forests as a resource concern is important to forest conservation.
* Strengthen forestry outreach, education, research and inventory programs that assist private landowners such as the Forest Stewardship Program.
* Support the Good Neighbor Authority so that Forest Service lands can provide timber to local markets and the receipts from the timber sales may be kept locally to help Michigan forests. The timber provided will also support developing markets.
* Expand insect, disease, and invasive species programs, to protect the health of our forests; such as funding for forest protections under the NRCS programs and federal/state programs to identify and combat these problems.
* Provide adequate funding for wildfire costs, so that they do not impair the programs designed for supporting private forests by appropriating their funding.
* Support the development of markets for wood and timber products to help forest owners add to the economy of Michigan.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry and to Senator Stabenow for inviting us to participate. Our hope is that the Farm Bill can provide the help that forest owners need so that they can provide a renewable, healthy resource now and for the future.