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**Forest Service Report Highlights Restoration Progress Made
Despite Growing Challenges**

*Agency Funding Fix Still Needed to Complete Necessary Work to
Make Forests More Resilient to Fire*

WASHINGTON, Nov. 10, 2015 -- The U.S. Forest Service has increased the pace and scale of forest restoration by nine percent since 2011, according to a report released today. The significant progress comes in the face of mounting challenges to the agency including record droughts, longer wildfire seasons and the increasing percentage of the agency's budget spent fighting wildland fires.

Despite the gains, at least 65 million National Forest System acres are still in need of restoration work. The rising cost of wildfire suppression, as fires have become more intense and more expensive to fight in recent years, has taken funding away from restoration, watershed and wildlife programs, limiting the Forest Service's ability to do the work that would prevent fires in the first place.

With a record 52 percent of the Forest Service's budget dedicated to fighting wildfire in 2015, compared to just 16 percent in 1995, the Forest Service's ability to do more restoration work within the current budget structure is severely constrained by the increasing proportion of resources spent on fire.

Before a single fire broke out in 2015, the Forest Service started the Fiscal Year with a budget of \$115 million less for all work not related to fire than the previous year. Budget constraints have also reduced staffing for restoration, watershed and recreation by nearly 40 percent, from about 18,000 in 1998 to fewer than 11,000 people in 2015.

"The Forest Service has made tremendous progress in conducting restoration work to keep our forests healthy and resilient. However, because of the growing cost of fighting more frequent and dangerous wildfires, much of the work that supports healthy forests is being starved", Vilsack said. "The magnitude of the crisis demands that we cannot go another year without a solution to the Forest Service's broken fire budget. There is broad

agreement that we need to fix the way we pay for wildfires. We have provided Congress with a straightforward solution to enable us to do the work we need to do and now it is up to Congress to act."

The bipartisan Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, already introduced in the House and Senate, is an important step forward in addressing the funding problems. The proposed legislation, which mirrors a similar proposal in President Obama's Fiscal Year 2016 Budget, would provide a fiscally responsible mechanism to treat wildfires more like other natural disasters, end "fire transfers" and partially replenish the ability to restore resilient forests and protect against future fire outbreaks. The bill would increase the acres the Forest Service could treat annually by one million acres and increase timber outputs by 300 million board feet annually.

The Restoration Report shows that in 2014 the Forest Service treated more than 4.6 million acres, an area larger than New Jersey and an increase of 9 percent, or 400,000 acres, compared to restoration activities performed in 2011. These treatments reduced the potential impact of future wildfires and produced 2.8 billion board feet of timber volume, enough for 93,000 single-family homes, compared to 2.5 billion board feet in 2011.

Healthy forests and grasslands provide Americans with clean air and water, wood products, energy, recreation opportunities, and habitat for fish and wildlife. Healthy forests are also better able to withstand the stresses of drought, a changing climate and wildfire.

The Report puts a spotlight on key partners that are helping the Forest Service increase the pace, scale and impact of restoration work. It also examines the Forest Service's expansion of the bipartisan Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLR) to high-priority landscapes in 15 states. CFLR has reduced the risk of catastrophic wildfire on 1.45 million acres of forest and generated more than \$661 million in local income and helped create or maintain an average of 4,360 jobs per year.

Some other highlights contained in the report include:

- The agency helped facilitate investment in more than 230 wood-to-energy projects with a combined investment of nearly \$1 billion in grants, loans and loan guarantees since 2009.

- Since 2011, the Forest Service has restored 1.2 million acres of insect and disease-infested forests, resulting in 470,000 green tons of biomass.
- Since 2012, the Forest Service has identified more than 300 priority watersheds and completed restoration work to improve the condition of 53 of those watersheds.

The mission of the U.S. Forest Service, an agency of the Department of Agriculture, is to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to state and private landowners and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world. Public lands the U.S. Forest Service manages contribute more than \$13 billion to the economy each year through visitor spending alone. Those same lands provide 20 percent of the nation's clean water supply, a value estimated at \$7.2 billion per year. The agency also has either a direct or indirect role in stewardship of about 80 percent of the 850 million forested acres within the U.S., of which 100 million acres are urban forests where most Americans live.