Document to Accompany FY22 Community Project Funding Member Requests

1. **Project Name**:
Mitigating Needle Blight: A Growing Economic Threat to Pine Forests

2. **Project Address and contact information**:
Auburn University

3. **Please identify the state, regional, or local governmental entity that is an eligible recipient of the funds**:

Dr. Lori G. Eckhardt, Professor & Director, Integrated Forest Pathology/Entomology,
School of Forestry and Wildlife Services, Auburn University
eckhalg@auburn.edu, 334.844.2720

4. **Does the Member, or any immediate family member, have a financial interest in the project**? No

5. **Amount of request**: $3,000,000

6. **Explanation of the request**, including purpose, and a justification for why it is an appropriate use of taxpayer funds: Pine forests and industrial wood plantations in the southeastern U.S. are crucial for the economic sustainability of the region. In 2020, Alabama forestry sales of forest products and related sectors totaled more than $11 billion. Costs associated with damage caused by non-native pests and pathogens within forests throughout the U.S. in 2000 were estimated as being valued at approximately $4.2 billion annually. Consequently, insect pests and fungal diseases are an issue of concern to the forest industry.

With over one-third of the counties in Alabama currently affected by needle blight, it is estimated that a 50% needle blight infection rate in Alabama's susceptible loblolly pine trees could result in economic losses of $2 billion. An investment in the mitigation of forest pests, such as those associated with needle blight, require adaptive management geared to prevention and remediation that provide economically sound solutions.

7. **Please provide the proposed legislative text of the project as you would like it to appear in the bill**: Auburn University proposes that the FY 22 Appropriations for the Department of Agriculture include funding for a research initiative that is designed to provide the information necessary to mitigate the needle blight described above. This funding provision would direct the Forest Service to spend no less than $3,000,000, in collaboration with Auburn University, on a multi-layered research project designed to: (1) determine the distribution and movement of the needle pathogens across the State of Alabama, (2) understand the disease cycle, (3) understand the environmental factors that drive the emergence and distribution of the needle pathogens, (4) determine if the appearance is due to more aggressive strains of the pathogens, and (5) determine the origins of the pathogens.

From: Rick Roberts <rroberts@rrg-llc.com>
Sent: Tuesday, October 19, 2021 11:41 AM
To: Lori Eckhardt <eckhalg@auburn.edu>
Subject: [EXT] Pine Needle Blight Request Status

Lori:

The Senate Subcommittee on Interior of the Senate Appropriations Committee (SAC) included language in their Explanatory Statement accompanying the Subcommittee bill that funds our Pine Needle Blight request for FY 22. The paragraph appears below.

I wanted you to know this, although the FY 22 Appropriations process is very early. While the various Subcommittees have approved their respective bills, the SAC has not due to a dispute between the Rs and the Ds over the topline budget amount as well as the overall budget allocations for the various Subcommittees. Until these disputes are resolved, the FY 22 Appropriations process will grind to a halt in the Senate. So, the outcome remains uncertain. However, we are off to a good start. Also, I have notified Dean Alavalapati of the presence of this paragraph by separate message.

Anyway, congratulations for this so far!

Rick

Pine Needle Blight (AU) - The Committee recognizes the effect of non-native insect pests and fungal pathogens on pine forests and industrial wood plantations, particularly in loblolly pines, across the southeastern United States. A total of $3,000,000 is provided to conduct collaborative research to determine the distribution and movement of needle pathogens, understand the disease cycle and the environmental factors that drive the emergence and distribution of the needle pathogens, and determine if the appearance is due to more aggressive strains of the pathogens and the origins of the pathogens.