

September 24, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
U.S. Senate
731 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

Our organizations are writing to you today on behalf of our millions of members of hunters, sportsmen, and other conservationists to express our strong support for H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015. We respectfully urge you to take Committee action on H.R. 2647 to improve the health of our forests and reduce costly wildfires. Our nation's federal lands play a vital role in maintaining healthy forests that are resilient to threats at a landscape level. The bill will help ensure that timber harvest and the creation of young forest habitat for wildlife remains viable on both federal and non-federal lands. In addition it helps fix the fire-borrowing problem that our country faces when fighting wildfires. H.R. 2647 passed the House on July 9th with bipartisan support and we urge you to move this or a similar effort to help fix the environmental threats of catastrophic wildfires.

All forest management plans are conducted with public input, and undergo NEPA analysis. The bill's use of the Categorical Exclusion under the National Environmental Policy Act will allow routine projects with known effects to be implemented more efficiently and cost-effectively to achieve the forest's desired future condition, as outlined in the forest management plan. Certain forest management treatments previously analyzed under NEPA in order to deal with issues like pests and disease, hazardous fuels, critical habitats for threatened or endangered species, salvage facilitation, and water quality do not need re-analysis on each similar project. These projects are routine, reoccurring activities with known effects, already fully analyzed and therefore qualify for categorical exclusions from repeated analysis. The acreage size limits defining these projects and the fact that treatments must be consistent with the approved forest plan should allay any concerns about the potential for overuse.

We also support the bill's provisions expediting large scale restoration after catastrophic wildfires. We likewise support the prohibition on restraining orders and preliminary injunctions. It is imperative that we work to restore wildfire-impacted lands for the ecological health of the immediate area and surrounding landscape, protection of the watershed, and economic vitality of the local communities.

Third, we generally support changing the way timber revenues are handled through Stewardship Contracting Projects so as to provide payments to counties. We believe this change will remove one impediment to using Stewardship Contracting and help garner and/or maintain support for the program. We do not support applying the same county payment treatment to stewardship agreements because they require a partner match.

We also support the concept of allowing use of Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration and Stewardship Revenues for planning. However, we suggest that you explore whether the current threshold is the correct number or whether it should be smaller. An infusion of federal dollars for planning, if not closely monitored, could provide an avenue for U.S. Forest Service staff to not fully utilize product value (i.e., timber receipts) and partner match dollars for on-the-ground service work.

We strongly support the efforts to limit litigation on projects by requiring those challenging the U.S. Forest Service, in court, to post bond to cover the government's legal expenses. We believe this will

dissuade groups from litigating only for the sake of delaying action, especially given the new incentives for collaboration that are included in this bill. We are pleased that the House tackled this complex and sensitive issue.

Finally, the House-passed bill provides a resolution to the wildfire borrowing process by allowing FEMA to transfer funds to the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management when other suppression funding has been exhausted. Fixing this problem is crucial because good proactive management must be coupled with a solution to the way fire-fighting is currently budgeted in order to find a long-term solution. Some Senators have expressed support for a different approach to the fire borrowing issue. We welcome any approach that remedies the problem and can gain consensus in the Senate.

We urge your Committee to pass a bipartisan forestry reform bill and address the fire borrowing issue. The wildfire issue cannot be resolved until our Federal forests are more actively managed. H.R. 2647 is a balanced approach that can be quickly implemented without lengthy new regulations and delay. We respectfully urge your Committee to take up forest reform and wildfire legislation in 2015. Thank you for your continued leadership.

Sincerely,

Archery Trade Association
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Bear Trust International
Boone and Crockett Club
Camp Fire Club of America
Catch-A-Dream Foundation
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Council to Advance Hunting and the Shooting Sports
Dallas Safari Club
Houston Safari Club
Masters of Foxhounds Association
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Trappers Association
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pope and Young Club
Professional Outfitters and Guides of America
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Safari Club International
Shikar Safari Club
Texas Wildlife Association
Tread Lightly!
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi
Wild Sheep Foundation
Whitetails Unlimited