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COMMITTEE ON  
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COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE  
COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-0404**

May 15, 2017

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

A wonderful opportunity exists in America to make our forests healthier, increase domestic production of building materials, invigorate rural economies, and reduce the federal deficit through a two phase approach of making prompt changes in the administration of United States Forest Service (USFS) policy while working with Congress to implement new forest management practices on our public lands. While the U.S. remains the world's second largest importer of wood products, our forests are overgrown, our forested rural communities are struggling, and builders are seeing an increase in the costs of materials.

The following recommendations are ways to provide administrative relief to immediately boost domestic timber production in existing manufacturing facilities while long term policies are enacted to give investors the certainty and market stability needed to expand production capacity. These recommendations have been compiled from forestry and wood products producers from various regions of the country. These professionals and many more are ready and willing to assist the National Home Builders Association (NHBA) in their goal of increasing domestic timber production, both from private forestlands and through increased federal forestland management. We stand ready to support you and your administration in implementing federal policies to increase the production of American forest products in the near term and for years to come.

- **Require that the Forest Service meet their 6.2 billion board feet harvest goal by 2018. Set a goal of treating and restoring 25% more federal forest land in 2017 and allocate clear goals on pace and scale to each USFS Regional Office (Region). This goal would translate to approximately 4 billion board feet of timber for 2017, up 25% from 2016.**
  - Under existing forest plans in 2016 the USFS objective was to harvest 6.2 billion board feet (bbf). Unfortunately, it reached only 3.1 bbf, 50% of its self-imposed goal. The Regions need hard targets. The Forest Service should set 2017 pace and scale goals for each national forest. Ideally, the USFS would reach the 6.2 bbf goal by 2018 which would assist in the creation of over 35,000 jobs, mainly in rural America.
  - To start with, the 6.2 bbf production goal from the national forests can be accomplished by doubling the number of forest health projects implemented on the forests by the end of the year. Enacted into law in the 2014 Farm Bill, two tools that can immediately be applied to increase work on the ground are: (1) the "insect and disease" categorical exclusion and (2) Good Neighbor Authority.
  - We encourage you to use your executive authority to empower willing Governors to execute forest management activities on federal land based on recommendations made by the Western Governors Association (WGA). Though the authority exists under the Good Neighbor Authority from the 2014 Farm Bill, USDA has heretofore failed to broadly utilize the authority, even though Governors are eager to take action themselves to address forest health and management issues on federal land. Wildfires often burn from federal land onto state and private lands. WGA has an extensive list of recommendations in its 2016 Resolution on Wildland Fire Management and Resilient Landscapes.
  - Expedite approval of all emergency situation determinations for fire salvage from any fires that occurred during the 2016 season and direct the USFS to expedite roadside and other hazard tree harvests from wildfires as well.

- For USFS to reach the goal of 6.2 bbf not only does the USFS need clear goals to strive towards, they need strong and committed leadership. One step towards achieving that leadership would be nominating Erica Rhoad as the Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment. As a natural resources Congressional policy staff and former Society of American Foresters staff, she understands what it will take to have the USFS focused on the 6.2 bbf target.
- **Immediately create a special DOJ unit to fight threatened lawsuits against timber sales and convene an interagency working group - led by White House staff - to streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation processes, as well as pursue reforms to the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA).**
  - By creating a dedicated unit of DOJ attorneys to quickly review every timber sale in development or pending, the President could both reduce injunctions against timber sales and fix problems long term. This unit would exclusively address all pending or potential litigation issues for USFS timber sales within 60 days.
  - Streamlining NEPA and the ESA will reduce the likelihood of costly and time consuming embellished litigation used by environmental groups to stall the harvest of timber on USFS lands. Supporting common sense forest project litigation and EAJA reforms will ensure frivolous lawsuits do not hamper your efforts to restore the health and productivity of our federal forests.
- **Reassign Forest Service D.C. staff to USFS Region offices, and increase the budgets for timber sales and road maintenance/reconstruction.**
  - The Washington, D.C. office of the Forest Service has 5000 staff assigned to it today--up from 1000 in 1998. The budget must be aligned with restoring timber management as a priority for the agency.
  - By reassigning staffers to USFS field offices, and providing them with the proper training, we can improve USFS' ability to carry out effective and efficient timber sales on federal land in a timely manner.
- **Support and actively promote trade with Japan and Korea as well as other countries that have demand for U.S. biomass.**
  - As more saw timber is harvested, naturally there will be additional low value fiber from tree tops and from by-products produced at the mills. By-products like bark, sawdust, and chips that will also need markets at home and abroad.
  - By fostering and promoting good trade relations with allies such as Japan, South Korea, and other allies that already have shown an interest in American biomass for their energy production needs, growth and innovation in the forest products industry can be supported and more American biomass related jobs be created as a natural outgrowth from domestic timber production.

We passed my bill, the Resilient Federal Forest Act (H.R. 2647), in the House last Congress with bipartisan support. The bill would have provided many needed long term policy changes to improve forest health and promote domestic forest products production as well as a fix to fire borrowing, a significant challenge within the USFS budget. Unfortunately the bill, like so many others, failed to advance in the Senate. I look forward to working with you and your staff to introduce even more robust forest management reform legislation this Congress, passing it through both chambers of Congress and to your desk to be signed into law.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman  
United States Congressman  
Fourth District Arkansas