

October 2, 2017

Majority Leader Mitch McConnell  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Minority Leader Chuck Schumer  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Speaker Paul Ryan  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Speaker Ryan and Leaders McConnell, Schumer, and Pelosi:

As you know, our nation is experiencing another catastrophic wildfire season. Over 8.5 million acres have already burned this year and we may break the record that was set just two years ago. Some of the worst devastation has occurred on overstocked, unhealthy federal forestlands, where wildfires have affected millions of Americans living in nearby communities and polluted the air with toxic smoke. We need Congress to reform the federal forest management policies that are a key cause of the worsening wildfire seasons and deteriorating forest health.

A tremendous amount of attention is being focused on the need end the practice of “fire borrowing,” where the U.S. Forest Service is forced to raid non-fire accounts when its suppression budget is exhausted. We support reforming this nonsensical system that has an enormously disruptive effect on the agency’s budget and operational certainty. However, fixing fire borrowing alone will not address the underlying forest health crisis that is literally fueling these severe fires or contain the exponential growth in wildfire suppression spending.

Any effective solution to the forest health and wildfire crisis must also include meaningful policy and legal reforms to increase federal forest management and thinning activities. 60 to 80 million acres of federal forestland is overstocked and facing serious threats from fires, insects, and disease due to lack of active forest management. The Forest Service estimates that there are over 6 billion dead and dying trees across the West. Growth and mortality rates continue to far outpace fuels reduction and timber removals on our national forests. We also know that many wildlife populations are suffering due to the growing lack of habitat diversity on our federal forests.

While we can’t completely prevent wildfires, science shows that active forest management and thinning helps reduce their size and severity. Active management can also improve the resiliency of forests to the effects of climate change and drought, while also creating and maintaining wildlife habitat. Over the past decade, countless committee hearings in both the House and Senate have come to these same conclusions. The hearings have also identified key barriers to increasing the pace and scale of restoration efforts, which include the excessive (and costly) analysis requirements imposed on even modest federal forest management projects and activist lawsuits that seek to delay and obstruct.

Legislative proposals in both Houses take common sense approaches to expedite needed forest management projects under existing environmental laws, including Categorical Exclusions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and streamlined NEPA procedures for larger, collaborative projects through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) or Environmental Assessment (EA). Congress also needs to place reasonable limits on the activist litigation that forces federal land managers to “bulletproof” NEPA documents and expend limited agency resources defending projects from the never-ending procedural lawsuits.

The forest health crisis affecting our forests will only be addressed if we treat its underlying cause through more active management. Bipartisan support exists for reasonable reforms that can help restore the health of our forests and the rural communities that are often forgotten in this debate. While we strongly support putting an end to fire borrowing – a high-profile symptom of the crisis – we urge you to advance responsible forest management solutions to meaningfully address this serious national problem.

Sincerely,

Alabama Loggers Council  
Allegheny Forest Alliance  
Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group  
American Farm Bureau Federation  
American Forest & Paper Association  
American Forest Resource Council  
American Loggers Council  
American Seed Trade Association  
Arkansas Timber Producers Association  
Associated California Loggers  
Associated Contract Loggers & Truckers of Minnesota  
Associated Contract Loggers – Idaho  
Associated Oregon Loggers  
Association of O&C Counties  
Audubon Minnesota  
Black Hills Forest Resource Association  
Black Hills Regional Multiple Use Coalition  
California Forestry Association  
Carolina Loggers Association  
Cloquet Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
Club 20 (Colorado)  
Colorado Timber Industry Association  
Communities for Healthy Forests, Inc.  
Douglas Timber Operators  
Federal Forest Resource Coalition  
Forest Resources Association  
Grand Rapids Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association  
Hardwood Federation  
Healthy Forests, Healthy Communities  
Hibbing Minnesota Chamber of Commerce  
Independent Logging Contractors of Alabama  
Intermountain Forest Association  
Intermountain Logging Conference  
Intermountain Roundwood Association

Itasca Economic Development Corporation, MN  
Jobs for Minnesota  
Louisiana Logging Council  
Louisiana Loggers Association  
Maple Flooring Association  
Michigan Association of Timbermen  
Michigan Forest Products Council  
Minnesota Deer Hunters Association  
Minnesota Forest Industries  
Minnesota Timber Producers Association  
Mississippi Loggers Association  
Missouri Logging Council  
Montana Logging Association  
Montana Wood Products Association  
National Alliance of Forest Owners  
National Wild Turkey Federation  
New Hampshire Timberland Owners Assoc.  
New Mexico Forest Industry Association  
Northern Arizona Loggers Association  
Oregon Forest Industries Association  
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association  
Professional Logging Contractors of Maine  
Range Assoc. of Municipalities and Schools (MN)  
Sierra-Cascade Logging Conference  
South Carolina Timber Producers Association  
Southeastern Wood Producers Association  
Southern Oregon Timber Industry Association  
Texas Forestry Association  
Texas Logging Council  
Timber Industry Labor Management Committee  
Virginia Loggers Association  
Virginia Forestry Association  
Washington Contract Loggers Association  
Washington Forest Protection Association