

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 4, 2017

The Honorable Paul D. Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leaders McConnell, Schumer and Pelosi:

As members of the Senate Western Caucus, we write to bring attention to this year's terrible wildfire season and ask for your support in prioritizing and passing critically-needed forest management and wildfire funding reforms in legislation that becomes law this year.

Wildfires across much of the West this year have been severe. Over 8.5 million acres—larger than the state of Maryland—have burned to date, hundreds of homes and other structures have been lost, emissions and dangerous particulates from the fires have threatened public health in many communities, and, worst of all, two wildland firefighters have died. In addition, the Forest Service has already spent well over \$2 billion to suppress the fires. The terrible fire season and its widespread consequences is not an anomaly, unfortunately. In fact, this is the fifth time in ten years that more than seven million acres have burned. It is also not unique to National Forest lands as it affects rangelands and grasslands across many states as well. Congress must act now to solve both the budget and management problems associated with wildfires.

We will never be able to prevent all wildfires or address all of the factors that contribute to fire. Congress can, however, take meaningful steps to increase the capacity of the Forest Service and other federal land management agencies to improve forest and grassland management and reduce wildfire risk. We therefore urge passage of comprehensive reforms that together would substantially increase the pace and scale of forest management, reducing the size and severity of catastrophic wildfire. We ask for reforms that:

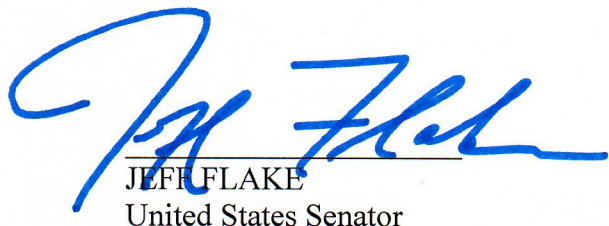
- Cut unnecessary red tape that needlessly slows down projects that would improve forest health. We support additional streamlining of project planning, such as analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, that builds on the 2014 Farm Bill provisions and other authorities and ensures a larger scope of projects developed through a collaborative process can be implemented swiftly.

- Combat litigation from fringe groups that continues to delay or outright stop much-needed projects. Many of these lawsuits are against projects that were locally developed by diverse stakeholders, including mainstream conservationists, and thereby are undermining the very kind of collaborative management that both Congress and the Forest Service have expressly encouraged.
- End fire borrowing and address the growing costs of wildfire suppression in a fiscally responsible manner.

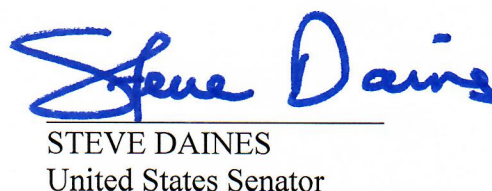
In addition to improving forest and rangeland health and reducing wildfire risk, it is important to note that these reforms would also create wood products jobs, provide revenues to forested counties, improve fish and wildlife habitat, improve agriculture production, protect at-risk watersheds and improve water quality, enhance carbon sequestration within our National Forests, and increase recreational opportunities on public lands. The benefits of increasing active forest and grassland management are therefore both extensive and integrated, and they are critical to the livelihoods and quality of life of the residents of our Western states and the experience of millions of tourists.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this critical matter. We are eager to work with you on developing specific management and funding provisions and enacting them before the year ends.

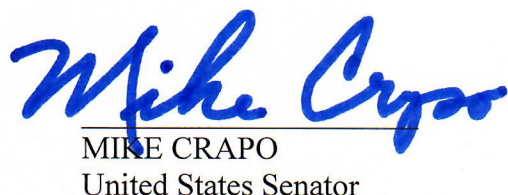
Sincerely,



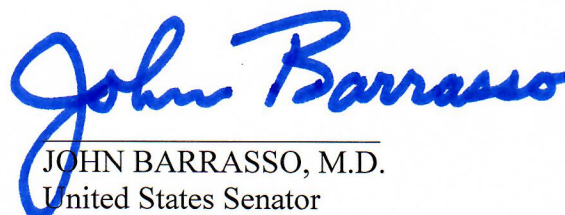
JEFF FLAKE
United States Senator



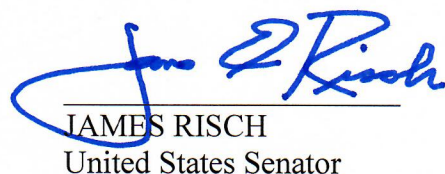
STEVE DAINES
United States Senator



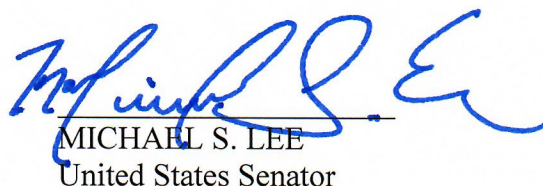
MIKE CRAPO
United States Senator



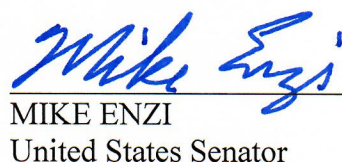
JOHN BARRASSO, M.D.
United States Senator



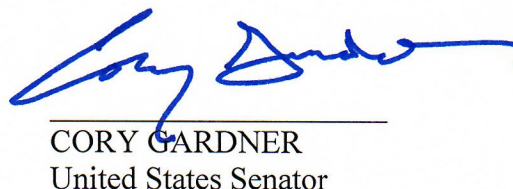
JAMES RISCH
United States Senator



MICHAEL S. LEE
United States Senator



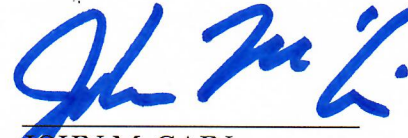
MIKE ENZI
United States Senator



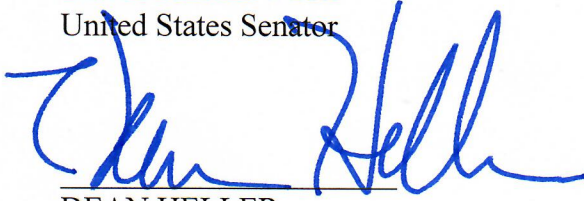
CORY GARDNER
United States Senator



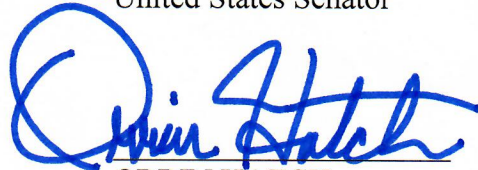
LISA MURKOWSKI
United States Senator



JOHN McCAIN
United States Senator



DEAN HELLER
United States Senator



ORRIN HATCH
United States Senator



JOHN THUNE
United States Senator




DEB FISCHER
United States Senator



JAMES LANKFORD
United States Senator



JOHN HOEVEN
United States Senator



JAMES INHOFE
United States Senator