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LEGISLATIVE HEARING TO REVIEW PENDING FOREST SERVICE AND FORESTRY RELATED BILLS

HEARING

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

UNITED STATES SENATE

ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS

FIRST SESSION

JULY 16, 2015

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LEGISLATIVE HEARING TO REVIEW PENDING FOREST SERVICE AND FORESTRY RELATED BILLS

Thursday, July 16, 2015

UNITED STATES SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY,
Washington, DC

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:01 a.m., in room 328A, Russell Senate Office Building, Hon. Pat Roberts, Chairman of the committee, presiding.

Present or submitting a statement: Senators Roberts, Perdue, Ernst, Tillis, Sasse, Grassley, Thune, Stabenow, Brown, Klobuchar, Bennet, Gillibrand, Donnelly, Heitkamp, and Casey.

STATEMENT OF HON. PAT ROBERTS, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF KANSAS, CHAIRMAN, U.S. COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

Chairman ROBERTS. Good morning. I call this meeting of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry to order.

Today, we will hear testimony from the Department of Agriculture on several Forest Service and forestry related pieces of legislation that have been referred to our committee. I welcome and thank our witness, Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, for attending today's hearing.

Due to the vote at 10:45, we are like King Tut. We are pressed for time. So, I am going to simply submit my statement for the record, I ask unanimous consent to do so. Without objection, it is so ordered.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Pat Roberts can be found on page 22 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. I yield to the distinguished Ranking Member.

STATEMENT OF HON. DEBBIE STABENOW, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF MICHIGAN

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding the hearing. I am not sure King Tut is exactly the image—I do not know. We will have to think about that.

[Laughter.]

Senator STABENOW. But, welcome to our Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, Robert Bonnie. Welcome. Thank you for your leadership.

Right on time, Senator Shaheen is walking in the door, and so we welcome her and her leadership on legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to thank you for putting together a bipartisan package of bills and really reflecting and building on what we did in the forestry title and other parts of the farm bill, conservation and so on, and I will submit my comments for the record. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Debbie Stabenow can be found on page 24 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you. I thank the distinguished Senator.

Before we turn to our witness this morning, I ask unanimous consent to enter a variety of material into the hearing record. I would like to submit statements for the record from Senators Enzi and Alexander on their bills, as well as numerous letters of support for the legislation before the committee. I would only add the paper industry will be pleased to know that the committee has received a stack of letters of support in hard copy for the various pieces of legislation in today's hearing.

[The prepared statement of Hon. Michael B. Enzi can be found on page 86 in the appendix.]

[The prepared statement of Hon. Lamar Alexander can be found on page 116 in the appendix.]

[The following information can be found on pages 47-117 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Our first—oh, there is Senator Shaheen. I recognize Senator Shaheen for comments she may make on her bill that she has introduced. The distinguished Senator is recognized.

STATEMENT OF HON. JEANNE SHAHEEN, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you very much, Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow and members of the committee, for the opportunity to testify this morning on legislation critical to improving forest conservation in the U.S.

Of all U.S. forests, more than half are privately owned and more than a third are owned by families and individuals. Private forest lands play a critical role in our rural economies. In New Hampshire, for example, the forest products industry contributes $3.9 billion to the state's economy and employs over 8,000 people. Private forests also protect wildlife habitats, improve air quality, and reduce carbon in the atmosphere. In fact, U.S. forests and forest products offset about 12 to 14 percent of U.S. carbon emissions annually, which makes forests one of the largest carbon sinks in the country.

Unfortunately, many private forest owners are under significant pressure to develop their land. Recent research by the U.S. Forest Service showed that housing densities are on the rise in areas where family-owned forest land keeps our drinking water clean and protects wildlife.

What is more, without proper management practices, many forests and their ecosystems are at risk of disappearing entirely. Land owners need a long-term plan that makes forest management more affordable and ultimately helps forest owners preserve their land.

Last week, I introduced the Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015. It aims to keep forests intact by providing financial incentives to private forest owners who undertake sustainable forestry management practices. Landowners would agree to maintain these practices under contracts with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for at least 15 years, and landowners who agree to a contract to permanently protect their lands would receive additional payments.

Since more than 90 percent of America's wood products come from private forests, the bill also promotes the use of biological products, including wood, instead of more energy-intensive materials. Wood products are a cost effective choice for many building projects because they can often be locally sourced, delivered quickly, and take less time to construct than with other building materials.

Now, with the committee's assistance, I am hopeful that we can advance this important legislation. The bill has already won broad support from groups including the National Alliance of Forest Owners, the Appalachian Mountain Club, and the American Forest Foundation.

I want to thank you all again for allowing me to testify this morning and I look forward to working with the entire committee to advance the Forest Incentives Program Act. Thank you very much.

Chairman ROBERTS. I understand that Senator Perdue and the distinguished Senator from Colorado may have bills also before the committee in reference to this subject. Senator Perdue, you were first. Would you like to make a short statement?

Senator SHAHEEN. Mr. Chairman, may I be excused to go to Appropriations?

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Oh, I am sorry. No, Senator Shaheen, we are going to keep you for the entire hearing.

[Laughter.]

Senator STABENOW. Mr. Chairman, would you mind if—I just want to thank Senator Shaheen. She has worked really, really hard on this whole area, which is very, very important. We appreciate your leadership, and thank you, Mr. Chairman, for including this important bill in the package.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you all very much.

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you, Senator Shaheen, so much for coming. Sorry for that.

Senator Perdue, would you like to make a short statement? We are trying to get out of here before 10:45.

STATEMENT OF HON. DAVID PERDUE, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF GEORGIA

Senator PERDUE. I would like to put it in the record.

[The prepared statement of Senator Perdue can be found on page 27 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Bennet.

STATEMENT OF HON. MICHAEL BENNET, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF COLORADO

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Chairman Roberts and Senator Stabenow, for holding today's hearing and for allowing me to speak very briefly in support of three bills that are before the committee today, S. 1110, S. 1671, and S. 1712.

Senator Mike Enzi has been a tremendous partner on S. 1110, the National Forest System Trail Stewardship Act. This bill would help us maintain and enhance trails on our public lands through volunteer efforts. Only one-quarter of the National Forest System trails are adequately maintained. Volunteers can help fill this gap. Just last year, more than 650 volunteers logged over 11,000 hours of trail maintenance on the world class Colorado Trail, which Caroline Bennet claims she is going to hike in her junior year of high school.

[Laughter.]

Senator BENNET. The bill I am cosponsoring with Senator Enzi is designed to encourage similar efforts.

I would also like to mention two other bills before the committee today. S. 1671 reauthorizes the Forest Service's program to provide matching funds to the National Forest Foundation. For example, through this foundation, guests at Colorado's ski resorts can give small, matched donations for restoration projects in the national forest that they are enjoying.

Finally, S. 1712 expands the authority of the Forest Service to sell small isolated parcels of land under the Small Tracts Act. This bill enhances the ability of the government to sell land that is not appropriate for public ownership.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would again thank the committee for holding today's hearing and I hope we can move these bills forward in the near future.

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you, Senator Bennet.

Senator Stabenow.

Senator STABENOW. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to say again that what we are doing today builds on what we did in the farm bill, which was a great bipartisan effort. Members on both sides got terrific programs in there that are just now being implemented.

But, Senator Bennet chaired the Forestry Subcommittee when we did the efforts on conservation and forestry in the farm bill, so I just want to say thank you for giving us a platform to get where we are today.

Chairman ROBERTS. Thank you, Senator Bennet. Well done.

We turn now to our witness, Mr. Robert Bonnie, who serves as the Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment at the Department of Agriculture. He directs the Forest Service and Natural Resource Conservation Service, and in a past role at the Department, he was the Senior Advisor to Secretary Vilsack on environment and climate change. Prior to his time at the USDA, Mr. Bonnie was Vice President for Land Conservation at the Environmental Defense Fund. He grew up on a farm in Kentucky, can sing the Kentucky "Old Folks at Home," earned his Master's degree in forestry and resources economics at Duke University.

Welcome, Mr. Bonnie. We look forward to your testimony.

STATEMENT OF ROBERT BONNIE, UNDER SECRETARY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, DC

Mr. BONNIE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate the opportunity to be here today, and I will keep my comments brief as I know lots of you all have a vote you need to get to. So, let me mention a few bills and then turn it back to you, Mr. Chairman.

So, I want to start with the administration's enthusiastic support for the Tennessee Wilderness Act. It will add nearly 20,000 acres to the nation's wilderness system and we strongly support the legislation.

We also strongly support legislation to reauthorize the National Forest Foundation. The National Forest Foundation is a critical partner of the U.S. Forest Service and allows the agency to partner with businesses, foundations, communities, and many others to accomplish a variety of important work.

We strongly support the goals of the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, which will require the Secretary to develop a strategy to increase the use of volunteers in trail maintenance. Legislation will help the agency address more than $300 million in backlogs of deferred trails maintenance. We look forward to working with Senators Bennet and Enzi on some aspects of the bill.

I would also note that the Forest Service trails budget, like most areas of the Forest Service budget, has suffered significantly due to the impacts of an ever-increasing firefighting budget. Today, the Forest Service typically spends about half of its budget on wildland firefighting, up from 16 percent in the mid-1990s. Without a fix to this problem, such as the Wildfire Disaster Funding Act, our trails budget and the rest of the agency's non-fire budget will continue to erode.

The administration strongly supports the creation of incentives to support carbon sequestration in forests and wood products and looks forward to working with Senator Shaheen to address some technical and capacity issues in her legislation.

The administration supports the National Forest Small Tract Act Amendments of 2015. The legislation will allow the agency to address a large number of small isolated tracts that are inefficient and costly to manage and that provide few benefits to the public. We would like to work with the sponsors to address some concerns in the legislation.

Lastly, I want to address the Prescribed Burn Approval Act. Prescribed fire is a vital tool for the Forest Service to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire, to improve forest health, to manage rangeland, and to conserve wildlife habitat. The agency typically conducts thousands of prescribed fires annually. In 2014, the agency burned over 1.3 million acres and it had only a single fire, the Pautre fire, get out of control.

Despite the best efforts of the Forest Service, using prescribed fire always carries risk that the fire will jump a containment line. However, the risk of not using prescribed fire, the risks of catastrophic forest fires on life, property, and natural resources, is much greater than the risk of using it. USDA and the Forest Service deeply regret the losses suffered by affected landowners in the Pautre fire. USDA and the Forest Service work hard to take ac-

tions to help the affected landowners and we welcome a conversation about additional steps we can take to assist landowners.

Our concern with the Prescribed Burn Approval Act is that it could have a chilling effect on the use of prescribed fire and the agency's efforts to reduce catastrophic wildfire. The requirement for local and state approval is likely to substantially reduce our ability to use this tool. Restrictions on the use of naturally occurring wildfires to reduce hazardous fuels could lead to more damaging fires in the future.

In the wildland firefighting community, there is a broad consensus that we need to use more prescribed fire to reduce catastrophic wildfire. We welcome a conversation on how we can do this safely while minimizing the risks.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Bonnie can be found on page 37 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Let me advise members that have just come in—Senator Perdue, Tillis, Bennet, and Heitkamp—we are trying to get done by 10:45 for the vote, so if you can keep your remarks, or your questions, at least, to a minimum.

I have got a question that falls within the Natural Resources and Environment mission area. Last week, the Department announced in a press release that 98 percent of farmers have successfully filed their necessary paperwork—I think the paperwork is AD–1026—for conservation compliance, as required by the last farm bill, of the new filers purchasing crop insurance that in the past have not had to self-certify the compliance.

My question is, do you have a grasp or some idea of how many will trigger an NRCS referral and subsequent administrative action from NRCS for a highly erodible land or wetland determination? We know that the NRCS has ongoing determination backlog issues in certain regions of the country. In light of the backlog and the number of new filers, is it possible to quantify this workload at the agency and how NRCS will prioritize working through the backlog plus any new administrative actions?

Mr. BONNIE. So, I do not have a specific number for you, but I am happy to go back and look for that. What I will tell you is that we have put additional resources into a number of states, particularly in the Dakotas, to reduce the backlog. We have also just finalized our off-site methods to look at wetland determinations, and our expectation is that will further help us reduce the backlog. So, I think we are making strides there. There is clearly more to do and we will work with NRCS staff and others in the Department to get the answer to your questions.

Chairman ROBERTS. I appreciate that.

Senator Stabenow.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Under Secretary Bonnie, thank you again for your efforts and the Department's efforts. I wondered if you would speak a little bit more about prescribed burns, because I am concerned. We have a very important package of bills in front of us, a bipartisan effort. One of the bills, though, dealing with prescribed burns, I think is of concern, needs a little bit more work to get this right. I know there was a specific concern that the bill responds to, which I to-

tally understand and respect. But, I know that while you need to exercise an abundance of caution that burns do not get out of control, that they are an important tool for the Fire Service.

So, I wonder if you might speak more about that, because I think we need to focus on that and make sure that anything we report gets this right so that you can continue to use that tool for managing forests.

Mr. BONNIE. Thank you very much. Prescribed fire is, indeed, a critically important tool for a range of issues, not the least of which is addressing catastrophic wildfire in large parts of the West. One of the reasons we have as intense fire as we have today is because for decades we have put out all the small, low-intensity fires, and fuels have built up in many of our forests and grasslands across the country. We have to have prescribed fire as a tool to be able to address that.

There is always an inherent risk in using prescribed fire, despite our best efforts, that some will jump containment lines, and I think we welcome a conversation with all of you of ensuring we do as good a job to respond to landowners when that happens.

But, what I would tell you is I think the risks of not using fire are substantial in terms of addressing catastrophic wildfire, and so we have to learn how to balance those risks at the same time that we are sensitive to the fact that we may have fires that get out of—that can get out of control.

The other thing I would say is that prescribed fire is very important for a number of wildlife issues, whether it is quail in the Southeast, wild turkey. It is a critically important management tool and we need to continue to be able to utilize that for a range of resource concerns.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the interest of time, I will stop at this point. If we have time at the end, I have another question or two, but at this point will defer to my colleagues.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Perdue.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be very brief.

Our bill, S. 1744, Mr. Bonnie, would allow your Department to well at market rate about 30 tracts of National Forest System land in Georgia totaling about 4,000 acres and use the proceeds to strengthen the existing forest. You may not have had time yet to look at it, as I understand it, but it is modeled after the same legislation in states like Virginia, Arkansas, Texas, Mississippi, and Florida. I know you have experience in those states. Can you just elaborate briefly for us that process and your experience there and how you worked with the conservation partners in those states.

Mr. BONNIE. Well, what I would tell you, while we have not had time to get into the specifics of the legislation, we support the broad approach. This is—it is an important approach that will allow us to deal with a lot of small tracts that are, some of them developed, some of them highly isolated, and that are, frankly, expensive for us to manage. The approach here is one we support, and then use the proceeds to work to purchase other more important tracts.

This is, as you point out, this is an approach that has worked in a number of states, and as you also know, there are a number

of conservation partners that have been working with you and others in developing this legislation. Again, we think it is a very sound approach and look forward to conversations with you and your staff on how we can move this forward.

Senator PERDUE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Bennet.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it. I wish every hearing we had moved with this dispatch.

[Laughter.]

Senator BENNET. During the—and, Mr. Secretary, thank you for your excellent public service. During the 2014 farm bill, we worked on a provision to designate acreage suffering from insect and disease epidemics for expedited treatment. As you well know, and I know you have seen, Colorado has been ravaged by the bark beetle epidemic. In Northern Colorado and Southeastern Wyoming, more than four million acres have been affected.

Could you please provide us with an update on the implementation of this new authority, and while you are at it, could you reinforce why changes to the budgeting process are so important in terms of fire borrowing?

Mr. BONNIE. Will do. I very much appreciate the question. So, from a standpoint of the fire budget, I will start there. If you look in the late 1990s, 1998, and compare the level of staff on the National Forest System today, we have about 39 percent fewer staff in the non-fire portion of the Forest Service than we had back then, and the reason is we have seen a substantial growth in our wildfire budget. As I said in my testimony, in most years, nearly 50 percent of our budget goes to wildland firefighting.

That challenge has reduced our capacity to be able to get work done, whether it is trails work, whether it is forest restoration. Now, the good news is we are actually getting more work done in the woods. We are increasing the amount of acres we are treating and we are producing more board feed as a result. But, the fundamental challenge for us is one of capacity. It is not a lack of will, it is a lack of capacity for the agency.

When you look at the excellent provisions in the 2014 farm bill—thanks to this committee and to you in particular for those provisions—we have moved quickly in working with governors to designate about 47 million acres across the country as areas that are insect and disease prone and that could use an expedited categorical exclusion under NEPA to address insect and disease in those areas where collaboratives have worked together to put together those projects.

We did not get any new additional funding, but we have got so far about 17 projects under—that are moving forward using this, and that number will ratchet up over time. What we were not able to do because we, for example, in Colorado, have got a team committed to working on a large landscape scale effort on the GMUG, we did not want to take those teams off and put them on insect and disease. We expect that we will do increasingly more projects. We appreciate this authority and will begin to build it into our broader effort. So, this will become a very valuable tool to us.

Again, the fundamental constraint with us doing more immediately has been just a lack of capacity.

Senator BENNET. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Tillis.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be brief.

One thing I wanted to say, I think that the Enzi-Bennet bill is a great idea. Actually, I probably would not have gotten involved in politics had I not led a volunteer effort for trail clearing for a single-track mountain bike trail on public land. So, I think that is great progress.

I did have a question about Senator Thune's bill and your comment about your concern with it. Is there something short of what he is asking for—I think what we are trying to get to is coordination between state, local, and federal authorities—something short of that versus simple opposition to the bill that you all have thought about?

Mr. BONNIE. So, I think a couple of things in that. We always try and do our best in working with the State Foresters in North Carolina and other states on not only developing burn plans, but also making sure neighbors and local fire folks know about these—this legislation. So, that is one piece. We are always looking for ways to improve the ways we do prescribed fire. I think we do an excellent job. I think we have got great expertise. But, there is always more work to be done there, and coordination with State Foresters and others in states is critically important there.

I think the other issue that I think we welcome a conversation on is what happens when something like the Pautre fire happens, where a fire escapes onto private lands. The Federal Torts Claim Act is one way to deal with that. We try to use other tools, including $41,000 through Environmental Quality Incentive programs, and we looked at FSA programs. The Forest Service looked at its own programs. I think it is worth having a conversation about how we can think about, whether it is thinking about disaster programs or other things in the farm bill. We welcome that conversation. It is to nobody's benefit to have neighbors or others who are upset about the use of this tool, and so we very much welcome a conversation around those issues.

Senator TILLIS. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Heitkamp.

Senator HEITKAMP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You probably were not real excited to see me walk through the door——

Mr. BONNIE. I am always excited to see you.

[Laughter.]

Senator HEITKAMP. You know, I want to just kind of talk a little bit about the Pautre fire and what has happened subsequent, and it is exactly those kinds of situations that have led to bills like Senator Thune's bill. I think one of the things that disturbs me about that fire is that when you look back, and when I talk to the ranchers who begged the Forest Service not to light that fire, who knew that they were at a high probability that fire would get out of control, in fact, when you look at the Bismarck Weather Service at the time, it called for gusts of 30 miles per hour in that area, but yet you guys lit the fire. That is one thing.

People make mistakes, but when you make mistakes in that context, against that backdrop, and then you proceed to tell the ranch-

ers, who have lost literally hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment and inputs that they have put on the grasslands and you say it was not negligence, and, so, we are at the spot here where I understand and appreciate that you are going to manage your lands and prescribed burns are part of that. But, you have got to have a response when things get out of control that is not, we used our best judgment. Therefore, we are never negligent.

If there is an opportunity to revisit that determination within the USDA and the Forest Service on what was done there and take a look at your "not negligent" determination, that would be greatly appreciated.

I am back to Senator Tillis's example. It is exactly examples like this that lead to what may be perceived to be an interference with making those decisions, and so I would ask that you reexamine the facts of that fire, you actually personally call some of the ranchers out there who have told me that they repeatedly asked that fire not be lit and that we take care of that problem, and then look at how we can fix those problems in the future.

Mr. BONNIE. Well, again, I think USDA and the Forest Service understand the deep concerns from landowners there and want to do everything we can to put it right. Our job under the Federal Tort Claims Act is to—we are bound by the law there and the standard is negligence. I respectfully disagree about whether we have met that standard and it is the General Counsel's call that we have not.

I think, again, we tried to do, through EQIP and other things, to do as much as we could to be sensitive to the ranchers, fencing and other things, after, and again recognize that there is more we could do there and look forward to a conversation, whether it is disaster or other programs, to look at ways that we could do more.

Senator HEITKAMP. Well, as you know, we have been involved with this fire from the very beginning in my office, and if this is not negligence—and I have a little experience with the law—if this is not negligence, I do not know what is.

Mr. BONNIE. Well, you have——

Senator HEITKAMP. You would never be held accountable.

Mr. BONNIE. You have a lot more experience in the law than I do, and so I certainly would not question that at all. I would just say, I think we welcome the conversation about what else we can do to work in this area. The Federal Tort Claims Act is much bigger than prescribed fire or the Department of Agriculture and probably deserves a conversation with the Department of Justice on those types of things. But, I think, again, we welcome a conversation about if there is more we can do.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Heitkamp, you have brought up an issue that is of a strong interest in the committee and we appreciate that. Secretary Bonnie, thank you for a straightforward answer. I think there is going to be a lot of meaningful dialogue that can come of this, but I am glad to say that you will be a partner in that effort, and Senator Heitkamp, thank you so much for bringing this up.

I would like to insert into the record the statement of Senator Brown.

[The prepared statement of Senator Brown can be found on page 26 in the appendix.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Ernst.

Senator ERNST. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know we have votes coming up, so in the interest of time, I will pass on questions today. Thank you.

Chairman ROBERTS. Splendid.

[Laughter.]

Senator ERNST. Thank you very much.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Sasse.

Senator SASSE. It went so well for Senator Ernst, I will say the same.

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Stabenow.

Senator STABENOW. Well, I appreciate that. You sure you guys do not want to—we are going to do a couple more questions here as we proceed. Again, thank you, Under Secretary Bonnie.

I wanted to ask you, Senator Shaheen has put forward an effort as a part of this package to help private forest owners protect their lands from development and has also recognized the benefits of using bio-based materials in commercial buildings. One of the things we did in the farm bill is promote bio-based manufacturing as a way to create jobs, making things, growing things, bringing it together. I wonder if you could talk more and update us on the Department's efforts in promoting wood products and other bio-based goods.

Mr. BONNIE. I very much appreciate the question, and to Senator Shaheen's point, about 14 percent of our greenhouse gas emissions right now come back down because of the forestry sector, because of the work, largely in private ownership, the work those landowners do. So, having markets, viable timber markets and other markets that create an economic incentive for landowners to maintain forest land is vitally important, not only for rural economic development, but also for dealing with a variety of wildlife and other environmental issues.

We have worked hard to implement the bio-based program, and the good news is, it has now opened up to wood products that can get the bio-based label. So, that is an important step forward, I think. In addition, there is considerable work going on in the Department around wood in tall building construction and green building. It is not an area I am directly involved in, but there is a lot of work going on there, again, to create markets for sustainable timber use. Also, a lot of interest in bio-energy and opportunities there to create markets. Again, we have to create economic incentives for landowners to want to maintain forest land and the best way to do that is by creating viable markets.

Senator STABENOW. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. Would any other member like to ask any additional questions? We are waiting on Senator Thune, who would like to ask a couple of questions. Senator Heitkamp.

Senator HEITKAMP. As long as we have a waiting period here, I do have another question. Senator Dorgan back in 2006 created a demonstration project which required Forest Service to work collaboratively in creating implementation plans. I have heard a lot

from the grazing associations that the Forest Service has not been following the procedure laid out in those demonstration plans. Can you tell us what steps you are taking to correct that and how we can work more collaboratively with our associations?

Mr. BONNIE. I know the Chief has been to North Dakota to meet with some of the grazers there. I know, as well, I worked with your predecessor and Senator Hoeven, particularly in the McKenzie Grazing Association, to look for ways that we could do a better job of working together. The Forest Supervisor in the Dakotas is committed to this. There is more work we can do. We are not going to agree on everything. But, I think, collaboration is key, and we have also, I know, worked with North Dakota State University on ways that we can use better science.

Senator HEITKAMP. Just to follow on, obviously, these demonstration projects are going to terminate in 2016. Are you guys committed to extending those demonstrations?

Mr. BONNIE. So, I am not familiar with the demonstrations. Happy to work with you on it, and I am assuming we are, but I am not briefed up on specifically these demonstrations.

Senator HEITKAMP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. I have one further question. Last year, the Department initiated the Joint Chiefs Landscape Restoration Partnership—that is going to be a heck of an acronym—between the Chief of Forest Service and the Chief of the NRCS to restore landscapes across different types of land ownership and to reduce wildlife threats to communities and landowners, to protect water quality and habitat for wildlife. Can you tell me what the future plans for this initiative will be and with regards to any additional program resources that could possibly be directed in a very tight budget toward this partnership. Could there be improvements to this partnership to foster more restoration on landscapes?

Mr. BONNIE. I really appreciate the question. The effort here is a recognition that wildland fire and watershed health do not respect property boundaries and that it is important to have the federal government in managing the National Forest System lands working closely with neighboring landowners. The idea here is to work across larger landscapes, particularly in areas where catastrophic wildfire is a challenge, to reduce fuel loads both on the federal land and on the private lands, and to use the NRCS programs to do that.

You have in a number of places across the country, I think we have, I want to say it is 27 or 28 projects now over the two-year implementation. States across the country are working with the Forest Service and NRCS, working with conservation districts, producers, and others to treat lands, to improve watershed health, and to reduce fire.

When we originally rolled out the program, we committed to three years. We will—I think that third year now will be next fiscal year and we will look for additional opportunities. EQIP has been very important in this area. I think we will evaluate after three years and decide whether we want to move forward.

Chairman ROBERTS. I appreciate your support for EQIP, which always seems to be suffering under the budget axe, and we, then, have the responsibility of restoring funds, which we will try to do.

Senator Casey.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Mr. Under Secretary, we appreciate you being here. We appreciate your public service, especially on these difficult issues.

I am one who believes that as we discharge our duty to do oversight, part of that is to be critical where we should and part of that is to be tough in our questioning, but we should also provide the resources that you need to do your job.

I wanted to focus on the resource question as it relates to invasive species. In our state, for example, the emerald ash borer has become a substantial issue, at least in the time that I have been in the Senate, and it is not a subject here I knew a lot about before I got to the Senate. I know you have to wrestle with these and other difficult issues, but first of all, I want to commend USDA for the response that has been undertaken over the last couple years in preventing the introduction and spread of invasive pests and plants. But, I come back to the question of resources and dollars. Can you give us a sense of, A, what you need, and B, how we can be helpful?

Mr. BONNIE. I very much appreciate the question. We have got a number of issues with invasive species. Emerald ash borer is one of the more acute, but there are a number across the country. They are creating real challenges for forests as well as other ecosystems, cheatgrass and you name it.

The Department actually has a number of agencies working on this. Agricultural Research Service doing some important research into a number of areas. APHIS obviously oversees a lot of our invasive species work. But, the two land management agencies deal with this in a significant way. NRCS, particularly as it relates to agricultural lands and rangeland, and then the Forest Service with emerald ash borer and others.

You know, a lot of our resources for this is out of our state and private forestry program and those resources tend to be passed through to state foresters and others on the ground for states to implement these types of programs. Like a lot of things in the Forest Service budget, those areas have been squeezed because of the increasing fires that we are seeing, longer fire seasons, and so we are having to make very difficult choices within the Forest Service about where we spend money. So, I will give you another pitch for the Wildland Fire Disaster Act and fixing the fire budget problem, which will help with this and a lot of other things.

So, I think that is one area that is important, and I think also looking at the opportunities for bolstering the state and private budget to deal with these is going to be incredibly important. I think there are some creative things we can do with NRCS dollars as well as some of the other agencies to continue to do work here, but it is a critical area and one that I think we wish we had additional funds to address.

Senator CASEY. Mr. Chairman, in the interest of conserving and preserving valuable time, I will yield and submit some in writing.

Chairman ROBERTS. I thank the Senator.

Senator Grassley.

Senator GRASSLEY. I have no questions.

Chairman ROBERTS. Are you well?

[Laughter.]

Senator GRASSLEY. I was taking care of the Finance Committee for you.

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. I really appreciate that. Did you get the GAO to answer the question that you asked them?

Senator GRASSLEY. Just the way I wanted it answered.

Chairman ROBERTS. I appreciate that very much.

Senator Klobuchar and Senator Thune would like to make an appearance, but at this time, I would ask unanimous consent——

Senator STABENOW. There he is.

Senator THUNE. Talk about perfect timing.

Chairman ROBERTS. But, I would just ask unanimous consent on behalf of Senator Brown, who was present before the committee, that his statement be inserted into the record just prior to the recognition of Senator Ernst. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Coop, are you ready?

Senator THUNE. Yes, sir.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Thune.

Senator THUNE. This is a bull rider here today. Is that just for me?

[Laughter.]

STATEMENT OF HON. JOHN THUNE, U.S. SENATOR FROM THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

Senator THUNE. Mr. Chairman, thank you, and thanks for holding this hearing, and thank you for your patience. I was running over from the Finance Committee, where we had a hearing on——

Senator GRASSLEY. A very important hearing.

Senator THUNE. A very important hearing that Senator Grassley was——

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. It was a hearing that was exceedingly important, and I should have been in attendance. Obviously, we were taking care of the forests of America.

[Laughter.]

Chairman ROBERTS. Including your state.

Senator THUNE. Equally important, I might add.

[Laughter.]

Senator THUNE. I would just like, if I could—and I have got a statement I will submit for the record, but ask just a couple of questions.

[The prepared statement of Senator Thune can be found on page 29 in the appendix.]

Senator THUNE. I know that the Under Secretary is delighted to have to wait around to answer some of these questions, but I have got a bill that addresses a situation that we faced in the last couple of years in South Dakota. We have had two fires that have burned out of control, one started by the Forest Service, which damaged a lot of property, cost people in Western South Dakota a lot of money, and never acceptance of responsibility by the Forest Service or any attempt to make whole some of these people who were affected by this. It happened two years ago up in Northwestern

South Dakota and then more recently here this year in the Black Hills near Wind Cave.

I introduced a bill that very simply would just require collaboration with local—with the state, local entities before these prescribed burns are initiated. I guess I would appreciate the question from Secretary Bonnie about any information that he might have about the number of claims filed over the past ten years resulting from prescribed burns that damage private property and the number of claims that were actually paid. Do you have that information, and if so, could you provide it to me in the near future?

Mr. BONNIE. I am sure we have it. I do not have it with me, but I am happy to provide that.

Senator THUNE. Would you support providing the Secretary with discretionary authority to pay upon receipt of credible claims indemnity payments under $25,000 or some other appropriate cap rather than forcing claimants to wait two years or more?

Mr. BONNIE. The two-year wait is clearly a challenge for many producers. I think what I said earlier today is I would welcome a conversation about more that we can do to make landowners right. It is not in our interest to have folks out there that are feeling like they are slighted by the federal agency. So, welcome the conversation. Not exactly sure of the right mechanism. As we tried to do things both with EQIP as well as look at some other programs, but I think we very much welcome that conversation.

Senator THUNE. Well, if we could, because the, particularly the Pautre fire up near Lemmon, South Dakota, several years now passed and this process just drags on and on and on. These people are left in just a state of complete uncertainty.

You provide in your testimony that an accelerated claims process could benefit individuals who have suffered damages resulting from an escaped prescribed fire when these unfortunate events occur. Do you have any suggestions about how an accelerated claims process could be implemented?

Mr. BONNIE. So, I mentioned earlier that I am nervous about—you have got the wrong guy up here if you want to talk about the Federal Tort Claims Act. That is a DOJ issue. But, I do think there are other things we could do. There are other programs. We could look at livestock disaster programs and others that might allow us to act more quickly here. So, I think, again, we are open to those conversations with you all and recognize that it is going to be important not just for these landowners, but, frankly, for prescribed fire going forward.

Senator THUNE. Okay. I appreciate that, that how we deal with these after the fact, but I also think that—and this is why we filed the bill—is on the front end, before these things are started, people who understand these conditions—the Forest Service had no business in a couple of these circumstances starting fires, given the weather conditions that were existing at the time, and people at the local level would know that. So, all we are asking for is consultation on the front end, before this happens, and work with folks and get their sign-off, and then on the back end, when something like this happens, a response that is actually timely, expedited, and effective.

So, I thank you, Mr. Chairman, for giving me the opportunity to make those remarks.

Chairman ROBERTS. Mr. Secretary, you can see very clearly that with Senator Heitkamp asking very similar questions and Senator Thune asking questions, this is a very pertinent issue, and I know you will respond, like you said before, with meaningful dialogue.

Mr. BONNIE. Absolutely.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Klobuchar.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Under Secretary, for being here.

I was actually at one of our paper mills just the last week, owned by Potlatch, an amazing mill with a hundred employees, pays incredibly well, and has been able to get through the downturn. Obviously, logging is very important in our part of the world. My Dad grew up in an area where my Grandpa worked in the mines, and when the mines closed, he became a logger and was in timber. It is very important up in Northern Minnesota.

There are some issues right now, and the first one I wanted to ask about was the multiple use of public lands. I met with officials, as I mentioned, at several mills in Northern Minnesota who are concerned that Minnesota national forests are not producing at their allowable sale quantity. I know the direction of the Forest Service timber program has improved recently and responsible timber harvests on public lands have grown to nearly three billion board feet.

What, if anything, is holding the Forest Service back from continuing this upward trend? Are you using the new tool from the farm bill, and what can we do to get to the actual allowable sale quantity, because for me, as Senator Thune brought up, you have forest fires because you have got wood that should actually be taken out, and then you have, right now with the economy doing better, you actually have a need for the wood. Instead of getting it from the forests, they are having to import it from other countries, which makes no sense to me, so——

Mr. BONNIE. It is a great question. So, our top priority in management of the National Forest System has been to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management to get more work done. As you point out, we have increased the amount of timber sold by about 18 percent since 2008, but there is more work to be done. The fundamental challenge we have right now is one of capacity. We have got 39 percent fewer employees on the National Forest System than we had in the late 1990s, and the reason for that is we are devoting more and more of our resources to fighting fire. As you point out, we need to do more work on the front end to reduce wildland fire.

The Wildland Fire Disaster Funding Act, as well as the President's budget, has a proposal which will increase the amount of work we can get done on the national forests by about ten percent. That is equivalent to about 300 million board feet. So, if there is one thing Congress can do in the immediate term that will produce more timber, that is it.

In addition, we are implementing the farm bill provisions, both insect and disease, which can provide some relief, as well, with

some streamlined processes. We will continue to move forward with that.

Then, good neighbor authority in the farm bill, as well, will be important for areas where there are state lands involved.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Right, exactly. We know in Minnesota the borders of our forests do not always align with private, state, or federal property lines, which often leads to these requests for conveyances, and you mentioned the good neighbors authority out of the 2014 farm bill, and that gave the Forest Service additional flexibility to work with willing state and private landowners, and I know you are working with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on several projects to increase timber production and protect communities from wildfire. So, is there an update on when you plan to conclude the new good neighbor agreements?

Mr. BONNIE. So, we finished—we now have the new templates that have gone through the Paperwork Reduction Act and been finalized, so we are now engaging with states directly on how to do that, and we are educating our staff through training and webinars and other things. So, there are conversations right now, and I believe in Minnesota, but I will check on that, with State Foresters and others about how to engage and use this authority.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Okay. We will have a follow-up on a staff level here to try to figure this out, because I think it would be very helpful.

Last question, the Northern long-eared bat. As you know, our forests are a great natural resource that provide multiple benefits, including habitat for wildlife. I have led now several bipartisan letters and worked with the Department of Interior—I just actually spoke with someone about this this morning—and USDA on ensuring the health of our forests, maintaining the communities, and preserving the Northern long-eared bat. As you know, we are trying to do this in a pragmatic way that allows our logging to continue.

Mr. Bonnie, will the Forest Service be able to implement its timber sale program this fiscal year and going forward without disruption due to the threatened listing, or will you need to engage in project-by-project consultation with the Fish and Wildlife Service?

Mr. BONNIE. So, I do not believe so. We have had conversations—I have had conversations personally with Dan Ashe, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, on this issue, and I know there are a lot of conversations at the regional and local level in the Superior and other national forests.

As you point out, the threat to the long-eared bat is not forest management. It is white-nose syndrome. Interestingly, the Forest Service is doing some of the best research on that right now——

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Good.

Mr. BONNIE. —and has some very good work there.

But, I think we recognize that we need to keep forests as forests in order to protect this bat and that means creating a viable forest industry, and we will continue to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to make sure there is flexibility through a 4(d) rule or whatever to ensure that continues to happen.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. Do you think we can still go forward with a timber sale program this fiscal year?

Mr. BONNIE. I do.

Senator KLOBUCHAR. We will not need this consultation? All right. Thank you.

Chairman ROBERTS. For all members, until the vote is called, if anybody has any questions, why, I am more than happy to recognize Senator Ernst and, I think, Senator Sasse, who also yielded back knowing, of course, that we were going to vote at 10:45. Obviously, that time has left. Imagine that.

Senator Gillibrand.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing. Thank you, Madam Ranking Member.

New York, which most people do not know, is one of the greenest states in the country, with 18.9 million acres of forest covering 63 percent of its land. That is nearly one acre per New Yorker. New York is home to the Finger Lakes National Forest, nearly three million acres of forest preserved in the Adirondack and Catskill Parks, and more than 787,000 acres of state forests. Each year, our residents and millions of New Yorkers enjoy cleaner air, cleaner water, beautiful vistas, recreational opportunities, and economic benefits, and our forestry industry actually employs 60,000 New Yorkers and contributes about $4.6 billion to our economy.

So, one of the challenges that the forests in New York face are the threats from pests, including the Asian long-horned beetle, the emerald ash borer, and most recently, the Southern pine beetle, and it is devastating Long Island and the Central Pine Barrens. The Forest Service National Strategic Framework for Invasive Species Management focuses on prevention, detection, control, management, and restoration. Can you talk a little bit about the ongoing efforts by the Forest Service to address the persistent pest threats to New York's forests and the emerging threats to our pine forests?

Mr. BONNIE. I am happy to. I think a few decades ago, nobody thought the Southern pine beetle was going to show up in New York, but, indeed, it has, and we are seeing a number. That is native to the South, but the other pests you talk about—Asian longhorned beetle, the emerald ash borer, and others—are obviously introduced pests. We have resources in our state and private program that pass through State Foresters that we use to address many of these threats, but there are also other parts, as I mentioned earlier today, other parts of the agency, of the Department, APHIS, NRCS, and others, that have resources here, as well.

There is an enormous need here and, frankly, we do not have the resources we need to do everything we can on invasive species, and I think we are having to make some difficult choices related to these issues. So, I think we will continue to focus on this, but as with a lot of things in the Forest Service, our budget is squeezed on some of these efforts and we will have to prioritize where we put our dollars.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Do you have a sense of how much it would cost to address these pests appropriately?

Mr. BONNIE. I do not. I think the price tag is very, very high for some of these, and I think if you open up the universe to things like cheatgrass and others, that the universe gets significantly larger, still.

Senator GILLIBRAND. So, I would like your office to prepare a budget and actually give us an estimate for how much it costs so that we can begin to think about, if we are really going to address these invasive species, what it costs so that we can debate it, discuss it, decide whether it is worth that investment. But, I do not want to hear the excuse, we do not have resources, because we have to meet these challenges. So, give me a budget, tell me what it costs, and then we as a committee will work on that and we will work with appropriators.

Mr. BONNIE. Great. Appreciate that.

Senator GILLIBRAND. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman ROBERTS. Senator Ernst, would you like to opine with any questions that you have?

Senator ERNST. No. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman ROBERTS. I appreciate that.

Well, members, that concludes our hearing this morning, unless anybody has any further comment. I want to thank our witness, especially, for sharing your experiences relating to pending Forest Service and forest related bills and answering questions in a forthright manner. Your thoughts and insight will be helpful as we consider the legislation later this summer.

This committee stands adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:54 a.m., the committee was adjourned.]

A P P E N D I X

JULY 16, 2015

Statement for the Record
Hearing to Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills
Senate Agriculture Committee
Opening Statement Chairman Roberts
July 16, 2015

Good morning. I call this meeting of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and *Forestry* to order.

Today we will hear testimony from USDA on several Forest Service and forestry related pieces of legislation that have been referred to our Committee. I welcome and thank our witness, Under Secretary Robert Bonnie, for attending today's hearing.

The bills before us cover a variety of issues either impacting the National Forest System or the management of state and private forest land – and all in ways that I hope will make the Forest Service more efficient.

I also welcome as our guest today Senator Shaheen from New Hampshire who is the sponsor of one of the bills on our agenda.

This Committee has oversight responsibilities of the U.S. Forest Service, the programs that the agency administers, and its budget.

It is my hope that this hearing serves as a reminder to the U.S. Forest Service and stakeholders that we are a resource and an ally to address policy questions now before Congress, such as catastrophic wildfire and forest management on public lands.

While most of the pine trees in Kansas are in the form of telephone poles, I want to convey to all those listening that this Committee has significant interest in the National Forest System.

I'm sure that my colleagues would agree with me, being a member of this Committee means that you not only represent your state's agricultural interests, but you also represent all of agriculture, of which forestry plays a most important role.

Forestry, much like production agriculture, faces many similar challenges whether it be over-reaching regulations from EPA, complying with burdensome and time consuming environmental laws and regulations, or protecting countless species under the Endangered Species Act.

The U.S. Forest Service has the primary mission and responsibility to sustain the health, diversity and productivity of our country's National Forests. The National Forest System encompasses 193 million acres of National Forests and Grasslands in 41 States.

In Kansas, the Cimarron National Grassland, located within Morton and Stevens Counties in southwestern Kansas, contains 108,000 acres, and is the only federally owned land in Kansas administered by the U.S. Forest Service.

Members sitting on this Committee represent states and regions of the country that encompass over 40 million acres of National Forest System lands throughout the Northeast, Southeast, Midwest, and Rocky Mountain West.

The U.S. Forest Service has been part of the Department of Agriculture since 1891.

And our National Forests are administered and managed in a manner to provide multiple uses and benefits – including outdoor recreation, rangeland for livestock, timber supplies, protection of watersheds, clean water, habitat for wildlife and fish, and even mineral and energy extraction.

But all is not well within our National Forest System.

The Forest Service readily admits that between 60 and 80 million acres of our National Forests are at high risk of devastating insect infestations, disease, and catastrophic wildfires.

Consequences from policy decisions in the 1990's to reduce forest management and set aside nearly 60 million acres of National Forest land from active management are now becoming more and more evident. Overstocked stands, plagued by chronic drought and uncharacteristic insect outbreaks, are sitting as hazardous fuel stockpiles susceptible to damaging wildfires.

A 75 percent reduction in timber harvests on National Forest land has resulted in overstocked forests which has been devastating to rural economies dependent upon the forest product and logging industries, further driving neighboring communities into poverty.

The 2014 Farm Bill recognized the urgency of these problems with the inclusion of provisions such as a nationwide expansion of the Good Neighbor Authority, permanent authority for Stewardship Contracting, and expedited authority for the Forest Service to conduct forest restoration on land impacted by insect infestations.

Since the enactment of that Farm Bill, over 45 million acres of National Forest land have been designated to receive expedited management as a result of insect infestations.

The Administration has pointed out repeatedly that fire suppression costs are threatening to swallow the Forest Service whole. Wildfire preparedness and suppression costs now account for nearly half of the agency's annual discretionary budget – that's up from 17 percent just over two decades ago.

Congress has before it numerous proposals to provide a stable source of fire suppression funding without compromising needed management.

As we move forward, my hope would be that the Administration would engage with Congress on the issue of reforming the Forest Service in addition to fixing the fire funding problem.

I look forward to hearing from our witness.

With that, I now recognize our ranking member, Senator Stabenow for any remarks.

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
Legislative Hearing to Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills
Thursday, July 16, 2015
Statement for the Record

Senator Debbie Stabenow

Thank you Mr. Chairman for convening this important hearing.

I would like to welcome Robert Bonnie – Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment at USDA. I look forward to hearing your testimony on these important pieces of legislation.

Before we dig into the substance of today's hearing, it is important to acknowledge that, as we speak, there are dozens of wildfires raging across the West and Alaska.

While many of these fires are burning in backcountry areas, there are still thousands of firefighters from the Forest Service and other agencies putting their lives on the line to protect people, homes, and critical infrastructure.

To those firefighters – we support you and thank you for your efforts to protect these communities.

Mr. Chairman, this Committee has a long history of legislative accomplishments on forestry matters and the bills we are considering today illustrate the central role we have when it comes to managing our forest lands.

As we know, the 2014 Farm Bill made important reforms to forestry policy.

It strengthened the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to help ensure local communities have the tools and assistance they need in combating insect and disease outbreaks.

It expanded the Good Neighbor Forestry initiative – a program that allows state foresters to do restoration work on federal lands – to all 50 states.

It also permanently reauthorized Stewardship Contracting to help the Forest Service achieve land management goals, all while supporting rural economies.

As we discuss major new reforms to forest policy – whether before this Committee, in the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, or other legislation – it is important to remember that the major reforms we made in the Farm Bill are just now being fully implemented.

We worked in a bipartisan manner in the Farm Bill to pass these commonsense reforms – enacting ideas proposed by Senators Thune, Barrasso, Wyden, Mark Udall and Baucus.

I would also like to recognize the hard work of Senator Michael Bennet who led the effort to expand the Healthy Forests Restoration Act, and pass other reforms, as our Forestry Subcommittee Chairman during the 2014 Farm Bill.

Senator Bennet's leadership continues as he's authored or coauthored nearly half of the bills the panel will review today.

While most of today's bills are regarded as noncontroversial, I would like to raise a few questions about the legislation pertaining to prescribed burns.

The bill, while certainly well intentioned, may have the effect of curtailing the Forest Service's ability to conduct important wildfire mitigation work.

Prescribed burns are an essential tool for the agency to make landscapes less vulnerable to severe wildfires.

While we certainly ought to do everything we can to ensure these burns do not get out of control or harm private property, I believe we may have more work to do to make sure this legislation does not have any unintended consequences.

That being said, I am glad we have an opportunity to hear the Administration's view on this and all of the bills we have before us today.

Thank you.

Statement for the Record

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
Legislative Hearing to Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills
July 16, 2015

MR BROWN: I first want to take the opportunity to thank Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow for organizing this important hearing. I appreciate the testimony today by Undersecretary Bonnie of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and I thank him for his public service. From the tourism dollars generated by state and national forests in Ohio to the direct payroll involved in the timber industry, forestry matters across Ohio. Covering more than 8 million acres, Ohio's forest contribute billions of dollars to the state's economy. This includes more than $15 billion in forest products—from handcrafted Amish furniture to industrial wooden pallets—and more than $2 billion in tourism. We must ensure that the United States Forest Service (USFS) has the necessary tools to manage and maintain federal lands, like Ohio's Wayne National Forest. Issues like invasive species, though, affect public and private lands alike. With almost 90% of Ohio forests situated on private land, we must ensure the USFS is equipped to help private landowners play their part in statewide forestry issues, like stopping the non-native emerald ash borer. Finally, forestry represents jobs. Ohio exports more than $200 million in wood products each year and the industry employs more than 100,000 people. We must equip USFS with the tools to effectively regulate, manage, and promote our forests to guarantee these natural resources for future generations. Thank you.

Statement of Senator David Perdue

US Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

"Legislative Hearing to Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills"

July 16, 2015

- Thank you Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Stabenow. I certainly appreciate your holding this hearing and having the opportunity to talk about Forestry bills pending before the Senate Agriculture Committee. A bill I recently introduced with Senator Isakson, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest System Land Adjustment Act, will strengthen the National Forest System in Georgia.

- This legislation is supported by a host of conservation organizations and the various local governments who have land affected by the bill.

- Specifically, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest System Land Adjustment Act-will allow the department to sell, at market rate, 30 tracts of National Forest System land in Georgia totaling approximately 3,841 acres and use the proceeds to strengthen the existing forests in my state.

- These particular tracts of Forest Service land scattered throughout Georgia no longer serve their intended conservation purpose. The primary reason for this is encroachment from growth and development, and because they are outliers from the core forest block.

- It would be a more efficient use of taxpayer money to sell or exchange these tracts and acquire already identified inholding and edgeholding lands for the existing forest boundaries.

- Due to their status as land within an existing forest boundary, it would be advantageous for all parties to make a trade or other transaction to improve the forest and allow a willing seller a way out.

- As with any transaction of this magnitude, it is vital that all parties, including the land owners, the counties, the Forest Service, and other outside conservation partners, work together to ensure seamless and fair dealings.

- This legislation was modeled after previous bills that allowed the Forest Service to execute the same type of deals in other states including Florida, Virginia, Mississippi, Texas, and Arkansas.

- I look forward to talking with you, Mr. Bonnie, about how we can strengthen the National Forests in Georgia and again, thank you to Chairman Roberts for holding this hearing.

SENATE AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

"Legislative Hearing to Review Pending Forest service and Forestry Related Bills"

Thursday July 15, 2015 – 10:00 A.M.

Russell 328 – Ag Committee Hearing Room

Opening Statement by Senator John Thune

- Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow thank you for holding this hearing today on forestry issues and forestry-related bills pending before this Committee.
- Mr. Chairman, I request permission to submit for the record this letter of support for S.1100 from the Eastern Pennington County Cooperative Grazing District.
- Federal agencies have initiated prescribed burns in South Dakota in the past two years that have burned out-of-control - one set by the Forest Service in northwestern South Dakota known as the Pautre Fire.

- And most recently one set by the National Park Service on April 13, 2015, known as the Cold Brook Fire which burned thousands of acres but thankfully was contained within the boundaries of Wind Cave National Park in the Black Hills of South Dakota.

- The Forest Service-started Pautre Fire burned 16,000 acres of mostly private land, and caused extensive property losses in northwestern South Dakota more than two years ago.

- Both the Pautre and Cold Brook Fires required firefighting units, equipment, and personnel from local jurisdictions to fight the out-of-control fires - the Pautre Fire taking several days to extinguish.

- After more than two years from the date the fire was set by the Forest Service landowners impacted by the Pautre Fire just two weeks ago were notified by the Forest Service that its own Office of General Counsel determined that agency personnel were not negligent and therefore ranchers who suffered losses as a result of this fire would receive no indemnity from USDA.

- Mr. Chairman, let me share with you just how inappropriate this determination of no negligence was.

- The Pautre Fire was started as a prescribed burn intended to cover just over 100 acres in northwestern South Dakota. Keep in mind this was in early April 2013 after one of the driest years in decades.

- Up until this time the area had received very little moisture throughout the winter months. In addition, on the day the prescribed burn was set by the Forest Service personnel temperatures were above normal.

- I visited with several ranchers after this prescribed burn damaged and destroyed fences, standing grass, and reserve feed supplies who told me that under the conditions the day the controlled burn was set that resulted in the Pautre Fire – no local farmer, rancher, or anyone else would have intentionally set any kind of a fire.

- Yet the Forest Service did just that, and a prescribed burn intended to cover 100 acres turned into a 16,000 acre out-of-control fire that that burned for several days and destroyed millions of dollars in property – for which the Forest Service now refuses to assume any liability.

- To stop these situations from occurring in the future, I introduced the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015, which would prevent federal agencies from starting prescribed burns on federal lands without first collaborating with state government and local fire officials.

- Mr. Chairman, I would like to make one thing **very clear** – I am not opposed to the use of controlled burns, in fact, I believe that properly planned, they are a necessary and effective forest and grassland management tool.

- In fact, I think their use could even be expanded, but these fires should be started only when conditions are appropriate, and not when fire danger is extreme.

- I do not intend for my legislation to negatively impact the use of controlled burns by a federal agency, and I am open to suggestions and modifications that would improve this legislation to fulfill its intended purpose.

- However, I firmly believe that if a federal agency practiced limited and appropriate collaboration before starting a prescribed burn or other fire, that the number of fires such as those that burned thousands of acres in South Dakota over the past two years could be reduced.

- Mr. Chairman, the second section of my bill deals with liability and damages paid by a federal agency when it authorizes a prescribed burn that burns out-of-control and damages private property.

- And instead of a two or more year waiting period it requires that payment of accepted claims shall be made by such agency within 120 days of a substantiated claim.

- Mr. Chairman, I look forward to further discussion on my legislation, and request the opportunity for this bill to be acted on, and improved through our amendment process in this Committee.

- My bill, S.1100 is a common sense bill with a proven need, as evidenced by two fires in my home state of South Dakota alone. I appreciate the comments offered by Under Secretary Bonnie in his testimony today, and I look forward to working with other members of this Committee and with USDA to lessen the risk of out-of-control prescribed burns and a more equitable, effective, and timely structure for reimbursement when the actions of federal agency personnel result in damage to private property.

- Once again I reiterate that I firmly believe that prescribed burns are an effective grassland and forest management tool – but I believe there are steps that can be taken to reduce risk without reducing their effectiveness or use.

- Thank you Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow and now I have a few questions for Under Secretary Bonnie.

Statement of
Robert Bonnie
Under Secretary
Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture

Before the
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate
July 16, 2015

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding S. 61, S. 755, S. 1100, S. 1110, S. 1671, S. 1712, S. 1733, and S.1744.

S. 61, "Kisatchie National Forest Land Conveyance Act"

S. 61 provides for conveyance of National Forest System lands to private ownership in an area of the Kisatchie National Forest that is inter-mixed with private land. The proposed conveyance involves two parcels: the smaller is two acres and the larger parcel is surrounded by private land. These National Forest lands are encumbered with 34 recreational residences, associated infrastructure, and 10 boat houses. Much of the acreage has lost its National Forest character. The isolated and highly developed nature of the Federal lands, combined with the uses occurring on the private land immediately adjacent to it, makes it more suitable for private ownership. The agency supports the intent of S. 61, however we cannot support provisions in the bill that conflict with property transfer requirements in the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). We look forward to working with the Committee to make needed technical changes in the language to that will also meet the objectives of the bill.

S. 755, "Tennessee Wilderness Act"

S. 755, the "Tennessee Wilderness Act" would designate seven parcels totaling 19,556 acres as wilderness in the Cherokee National Forest in eastern Tennessee. The Department strongly supports this legislation as the areas proposed for wilderness designation in S. 755 were recommended for designation as wilderness by the Forest Service in the development of its 2004

Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Cherokee National Forest and have been managed as recommended wilderness since that time. Public involvement was an integral part of the Forest Plan revision process. Individuals, groups, other agencies and various organizations were involved with the identification of recommended Wilderness. For years, this proposal has garnered bipartisan support from Tennessee businesses, organizations, and community leaders. The U.S. Forest Service has testified in the past that it strongly supports this bill.

S. 1100, "Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015"

S. 1100 would prohibit the Forest Service from authorizing a prescribed burn on Federal land under certain high risk conditions, unless prior approval is obtained from State and local officials. In addition, the bill would establish a special new claims process outside the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) for payment for damages to private property incurred by an escaped prescribed burn, would make the United States strictly liable for any such damage, and would require a report to Congress on the number and location of all prescribed burns each year and a list of prescribed burns that were authorized by State and local officials.

Prescribed burns, however, are a very important management tool to achieve forest management objectives for not only the Forest Service, but also our partner organizations, including The Nature Conservancy, the National Wild Turkey Federation, and the States. The National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, which was collaboratively developed by a wide range of stakeholders, including States, supports increased use of prescribed burns. In 2014 the agency conducted prescribed burns on 1,357,791 acres of National Forest System lands. We understand that there are risks inherent in use of prescribed burns, and sometimes prescribed fires escape; the agency works diligently to reduce this risk. In FY 2014 the agency conducted 4,363 prescribed burns; only one escaped.

The Agency agrees that an accelerated claims process could benefit individuals who have suffered damages resulting from an escaped prescribed fire when these unfortunate events occur. However, USDA has serious concerns with the bill in its current form. For example:

Section 2 of the bill, includes both ignited fires as well as naturally occurring wildfires allowed to burn to meet management objectives in the definition of "prescribed burn." Inclusion of the latter type of fire could have nation-wide implications for wildfire response because it would require State and local approval for some wildfire response decisions. This would hamper the wildfire response and lead to increased costs, public safety issues, more complicated response actions, and resource damages.

Section 3(a) would require the Forest Service to adhere to indicators of fire danger at the county level before conducting prescribed burns, unless prior approval is obtained from State and local officials. Currently, fire danger is determined locally on a forest-by-forest basis; the Chief of the Forest Service does not make fire danger declarations. Additionally, the Grassland Fire Danger Index (GFDI) forecast from the National Weather Service (NWS) is not available nation-wide and is not well suited for use outside of the Great Plains. Most grassland burning occurs during dormant or curing conditions in the Spring or Fall, which is during "high" fire danger conditions, so by default this bill would require State and local approval for almost all prescribed fire projects in the grasslands.

In addition, section 3(c) of the bill waives the sovereign immunity of the United States for damages, imposes strict liability on the Government for any damages caused by a prescribed burn, and implies establishment of a claims process. All of this would be outside the bounds of the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) and its incorporated State law liability standards that Congress enacted to process such claims.

The bill imposes on the government full liability for all losses but does not allow for consideration of extenuating circumstances or the degree to which an adjacent landowner's actions contributed to the extent of the damages incurred (e.g., buildings that do not comply with applicable fire codes, properties that are not cleared of vegetation as required by local ordinance, or loss of livestock trespassing on NFS lands). The budgetary impacts of this are unclear, but could be substantial. The bill requires payment for "substantiated claims" within 120 days of receipt but is silent as to the source of funding for such payments. This bill would have implications far beyond USDA, and removes the Department of Justice from its current

supervisory role over the administrative claims process for these types of claims. In addition, the agency is concerned that by assuming a role in the approval process, State and local governments may also be assuming liability for damages.

S. 1110, "National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act"

The Administration supports the goals of S. 1110. This bill would require the Secretary, within 2 years of enactment of the Act, to publish a strategy in the Federal Register to significantly increase the role of volunteers and partners in trail maintenance. The bill also requires the Secretary to study opportunities to use fire crews for trail maintenance; adopt regulations and policies to ensure that financial risks from volunteer liability are shared agency-wide; select 9 to 15 priority areas for increased trail maintenance accomplishments; enter into cooperative agreements with any State, tribal, local governmental and private entity to carry out the Act; and establish a pilot program on at least 20 administrative units to offset all or part of the land use fee for an outfitting and guiding permit holder by the cost of construction, improvement, or maintenance of NFS trails, trailheads, or developed sites.

We appreciate the focus of the bill on addressing the Forest Service's trails maintenance backlog. The 2013 GAO Trails Maintenance Report confirmed that the Forest Service has over $314 million in deferred trails maintenance. The Forest Service is working with trails partners and other interested parties to develop a comprehensive Framework for a Sustainable Trails System that will guide management and stewardship of our trails for decades. Many of the elements highlighted in S. 1110 will be integrated into the National Trails Framework, including the emphasis on working with volunteers and partner organizations. We believe that this Framework will address NFS trail concerns in a comprehensive manner, and we look forward to working with the Committee to ensure the long-term stewardship of our network of trails.

With respect to Section 4(d), we agree that volunteer liability needs to be addressed for our trail partners. We would like to work with the Committee on language that adequately addresses this concern.

In reference to Section 4(c), fire suppression crews are primarily funded under the Preparedness and Suppression budget line items in the Wildland Fire Management Account. However, after completion of pre-season training and other preparedness work, if fire crews are not assigned to suppression work, the crew's host unit will typically assign them to assist other program areas. When fire levels or indices are low, the fire crews are more readily available for work in other program areas. However, when fire levels or indices are high, fire crews are less available for other types of work, especially in remote locations, where their ability to respond quickly may be restricted.

Section 7 of the bill would require the agency, within one year of enactment, to establish a pilot program on not less than 20 administrative units to offset all or part of the land use fee for an outfitting and guiding permit by the cost of the work performed by the permit holder to construct, improve, or maintain NFS trails, trailheads, or developed sites that support public use under terms established by the Secretary. The Agency would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee on clarifications to this section of the bill. This authority has the potential to help us address trail maintenance backlogs on NFS lands.

However, we would need to sort out details related to oversight, enforcement, training, equipment audits, certification for use of specialized equipment, such as saws, availability of tools and materials required for construction and maintenance, accountability regarding offset of the land use fee, and the potential need to change operating plans for these permits. We would also need to ensure that applicable requirements were met in advance of the work performed.

As written, the bill would result in loss of funds currently returned to the fee area for maintenance by Forest staff, supervised volunteers, and paid youth corps crews. Further, the bill does not address workers' compensation insurance, tort liability, or bonding requirements.

S. 1671, "National Forest Foundation Reauthorization of 2015"

S. 1671 extends the authority in the National Forest Foundation Act to provide matching funds to the National Forest Foundation and extends the authorization of appropriation through FY 2018. USDA strongly supports this bill.

The National Forest Foundation (NFF), chartered by Congress, engages Americans in community-based and national programs that promote the health and public enjoyment of the 193-million-acre National Forest System, and administers private gifts of funds and land for the benefit of the National Forests. The NFF is governed by an independent, private-sector Board of Directors who volunteer their time, expertise, and philanthropic interests to support the organization's mission.

The NFF's program accomplishments from 2001 to 2013 include completing 1,548 projects with results that include:

- 14,445 miles of trail restored or maintained;
- Nearly 4.4 million trees and shrubs planted;
- More than 500,000 acres of fuel reduction completed or planned;
- 120,247 people volunteered 1,524,230 hours with an estimated value of $33.7 million;
- 46,013 youth employed or engaged;
- Approximately 80,000 acres of invasive weeds treated;
- 117,253 acres of wildlife habitat restored or maintained; and,
- More than 3,000 miles of streams surveyed or restored.

Through the Matching Awards Program and fundraising campaigns, the NFF attracts private support to help meet the challenges of caring for the National Forest System. Over the past three years the NFF has leveraged $4.30 for every $1 of Federal appropriated funds invested through the grant programs and involved 39,000 volunteers in projects and programs that are aligned with the Forest Service's priorities. In addition to the Federal Matching Awards Program, the NFF is in its final year of a $125 million *Treasured Landscapes* campaign, the current total in this unique public-private partnership is over $113 million. NFF has also facilitated over 100 stakeholder meetings to help build consensus around conservation activities.

S. 1712, "The National Forest Small Tract Act Amendments of 2015"

The Small Tracts Act has served the Forest Service well since it was originally passed in 1983. It has provided the discretion to resolve a range of management problems through conveyance of

small, unmanageable parcels and those occupied by encroachments, but only if the conveyance is in the public interest. The Small Tracts Act is a critical tool for national forests, as it provides a way to address local land concerns, consolidate land ownership, improve land management, reduce administrative costs, and can enhance public access to public land.

S.1712 amends the original Act to add three additional categories of parcels eligible for conveyance, including isolated, inaccessible parcels and parcels already under permit for permanent uses, such as cemeteries and landfills. It also allows the agency to retain the proceeds from the sale of these lands and use the funds to acquire recreational access, to complete recreation related deferred maintenance, and to address facility needs. The bill retains the existing safeguards in place to protect public resources.

The Department supports S.1712. It is similar to a legislative change proposed in the President's FY15 budget proposal. We would like to work with the Committee on the provision permitting the diversion of funds to deferred maintenance projects. In addition, we would like to work with the Committee on minor modifications to the language, which would allow the proceeds to be available without further appropriation and would allow the authority to include up to one additional acre abutting permitted cemeteries to address imminent capacity issues.

S. 1733, "A bill to establish a forest incentives program to keep forests intact and sequester carbon on private forest land of the United States"

S. 1733 establishes a forest carbon incentives program. The Administration supports efforts to enhance carbon storage in the nation's forests and in forest products. Presently forests and forest products offset nearly 14% of annual greenhouse gas emissions[1], providing a critical buffering capacity to combat climate change. This capacity is at risk over the coming decades due to anticipated increases in climate-related stressors, such as fire, insects and disease, and projected increases in development pressure. The Administration recognizes that many of the investments needed to maintain and enhance forest carbon stocks, including forest restoration, private forest

[1] First Biennial Report of the United States and America.
http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/219039.pdf

retention, markets for wood products, and urban forestry, also have important co-benefits for the environment and for community economic development.

There are more than ten million non-industrial forest landowners in the U.S. The forests land they own makes up about 360 million acres, about half of the forested acres in the U.S. Ninety five percent of these forested lands consist of holdings of 100 acres or less and fully sixty percent are held in parcels of 10 acres or less. These lands make up a significant proportion of the carbon currently being sequestered today and a significant proportion of our potential to sequester carbon in the future.

We would like to work with the Committee to address some technical and capacity issues with the bill. For example, small landowners may have difficulties meeting reporting and monitoring requirements.

S.1744, "Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015"

Since this bill was just recently introduced, the agency has not had sufficient time to review the language. The agency may support this land conveyance authority; however, we will review the language in more detail and would like to work with the sponsor on the bill language.

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED FOR THE RECORD

JULY 16, 2015

JOHN THUNE
SOUTH DAKOTA

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION & FORESTRY
COMMERCE, SCIENCE & TRANSPORTATION
FINANCE

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4105

http://www.thune.senate.gov

July 9, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

I write to request inclusion of the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015 (S.1100), which I introduced on March 27, 2015, in any upcoming hearings regarding the Forestry Title. This bill would create greater accountability for the federal government when using prescribed burns on public lands. This bill would also expedite the process that reparation can be made to parties damaged by out of control fires started by the federal government.

Please contact Lynn Tjeerdsma (4-2697) or Ty Littau (4-2803) with any questions.

Sincerely,

JOHN THUNE
United States Senator

Eastern Pennington County
Cooperative Grazing District
23954 Recluse Road
Philip, SD 57567
605-859-2144
cantrell@gwtc.net

July 10, 2015

Dear Senator Thune,

The board of directors of the Eastern Pennington County Cooperative Grazing District would like to express our approval of the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015 you have introduced to Congress regarding prescribed burns on federal lands. We represent members on the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands in South Dakota who hold grazing permits throughout the Wall Ranger District. Our members own private property which is highly intermingled with Forest Service land and we are greatly concerned with Forest Service policy when implementing prescribed burns on federal pastures which are next to private pastures or in some cases private property such as ranch headquarters. Your bill would insure collaboration with state government and local fire officials if the Grassland Fire Danger Index indicates a high fire danger. We also appreciate language to make federal agencies liable when private property damage does occur. Forest Service policy does not even address this issue in any timely or common sense manner as Grand River permittees can attest to.

We have seen recently, with the Pautre Fire and also the Cold Brook Fire, the devastation that can be caused when these burns get out of control and while we know that the Forest Service feels they are taking every precaution necessary to minimize risks, requiring extra collaboration and approval from other interested parties and requiring accountability if a burn causes private property damage just makes sense. Again, we appreciate this bill being introduced and support it 100%.

Wayne Fortune, President
Clay Schaack, Director
Richard Papousek, Director
Shaun Ruland, Director
Gary Williams, Director



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF THE AMERICAN HORSE COUNCIL

UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON AGRICLUTURE, NUTRITON AND FORESTRY

July 16, 2015

The American Horse Council (AHC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of the National Forest Service Trail Stewardship Act of 2015 (S.1110).

The AHC is the national association that represents the horse industry before Congress and the federal regulatory agencies. The AHC includes individual members and over 120 equine organizations representing all horse breeds and virtually every facet of the horse industry, including, horse owners, breeders, veterinarians, race tracks, horse shows, state horse councils, recreational riders rodeos, farriers, breed registries, horsemen's associations, and commercial suppliers.

The horse industry, in all its segments of racing, showing, recreation, and work horses involves 9.2 million horses, nearly 2 million horse owners, has a $102 billion impact on the U.S. economy and supports 1.4 million full-time jobs. It involves agriculture, sport, entertainment, gaming, recreation and exercise, all built on the breeding, training, use and enjoyment of horses and horse activities. The recreational horse industry alone contributes $31.1 billion a year to the economy and supports nearly 435,082 jobs nationwide.

The recreational riding industry is dependent on access to public lands and well-maintained trails on those public lands. America's National Forests and the National Forest Trail System in particular are extremely important to the equestrian community and recreational riders. Hundreds of thousands of Americans of all ages use horses and pack stock to enjoy America's National Forests. Riding provides Americans with a link to the past and a chance to see and experience America's great public lands from horseback just as early explorers and settlers did. Equestrian activities in the National Forest also play an important role in connecting young Americans with the outdoors.

Unfortunately, A June, 2013 study by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that the Forest Service has deferred trail maintenance needs that exceed $500,000,000, and only one-quarter of the agency's 158,000 miles of trails meets agency standards for maintenance. This maintenance backlog is causing access and safety issues for equestrians and all trail users in the National Forests.

The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (S.1110), introduced by Senators Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Michael Bennet (D-CO), will help address the current trail

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maintenance backlog in America's National Forests. Significantly, the bill will do this without adding to the federal budget deficit.

Specifically, the bill directs the Forest Service to develop a strategy to more effectively utilize volunteers and partners to assist in maintaining trails. Right now, the Forest Service has no overall strategy for increasing volunteerism and partnerships and ensuring that volunteers and partners are effectively utilized for trail maintenance projects. Such a strategy is sorely needed, and will help the agency meet its trail maintenance demands. Additionally, the bill addresses a liability issue that has discouraged some National Forests from utilizing volunteers and partner organizations to help perform trail maintenance.

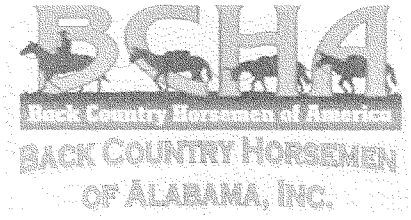
Many of the most pressing trail maintenance issues within National Forests are located in a small number of areas that receive intense use and have significant trail maintenance shortfalls. The bill requires the Forest Service to identify 9-15 priority areas on National Forest lands across the country for increased trail maintenance. The areas would be selected after public input, and will benefit from the increased maintenance activities.

Currently, many outfitters and guides perform trail maintenance on their own for free. The bill establishes a pilot program to allow outfitters and guides to treat their trail maintenance activities as an in-kind donation to offset fees owed to the federal government. This will lead to increased trail maintenance activities by outfitters and guides.

The legislation is supported by over 60 organizations representing equestrians, sportsmen, conservation groups, motorized recreation groups, outfitters and guides, trail organizations, and local and state governments.

The AHC urges the committee to take prompt action on the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and ensure all Americans continue to have access to recreational opportunities in our National Forests.

The AHC appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony to the committee. If the committee would like any additional information about the bill or the horse industry, please contact us.



April 10, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Alabama to express our support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Tina Stow

BACKCOUNTRY HORSEMEN OF ARIZONA

April 9, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

We are writing on behalf of the Arizona State Chapters of the Back Country Horsemen of America, BCHAZ, http://www.bchaz.org/ , to express our support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

Volunteer groups are active, willing partners in support of the Forest Service and BLM. In 2014, BCH of AZ contributed 2159 volunteer hours doing trail maintenance work in 3 or more national forests and 3 or more wilderness areas as well as various state and local properties. This volunteer effort is considered to be worth $95,072. In addition, we use our pack animals to haul equipment and supplies into wilderness areas in support of other volunteer groups, working deep in interior areas to help keep the trail systems in shape. These volunteer efforts help bridge a portion of the lack of financial resources available to the Forest Service, but a big financial gap remains. We are strategic partners and stakeholders in the approval of this legislation — we need Congressional help."

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Gayle Higgs, President, Back Country Horsemen of Arizona higgsgayle@gmail.com

Russell Wright, Arizona National Director of BCHA rlwright@frontiernet.net

Steve Mc Clintock, Arizona National Director of BCHA steve.w.mcclintock@gmail.com

BACKCOUNTRY
HORSEMEN
OF AMERICA



January 29 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Backcountry Horsemen of America to express our support for the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, introduced in the last Congress as H.R. 4886. We are hearing from bill sponsors that it may soon be reintroduced into the 114th Congress.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and we ask you to please co-sponsor the bill once it is introduced.

Sincerely,

Alan Hill
President
Shasta Trinity unit BCHC (current)
Past National Chair BCHA (1999-2001)
Public Liaison Chair BCHA (current)
Member Executive Committee BCHA (current)

PO Box 492527
Redding, CA 96049
530-221-8531
530 227-6234 cell

February 4, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Colorado to express our support for the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, introduced in the last Congress as H.R. 4886. We are hearing from bill sponsors that it may soon be reintroduced into the 114th Congress.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and we ask you to please co-sponsor the bill once it is introduced.

Sincerely,

Jan P. Potterveld

Jan P. Potterveld
Chairman, Back Country Horsemen of Colorado
2526 El Corona Drive, Grand Junction, CO 81501
jpotterveld01@gmail.com

BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF IDAHO



February 27, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Idaho to express our support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Karen Kimball, Chairperson, BCH of Idaho

June 13, 2015

Honorable Daniel Coats
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Joe Donnelly
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Coats and Senator Donnelly:

I am writing on behalf of **Hoosier Back Country Horsemen of Indiana** to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship. I ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

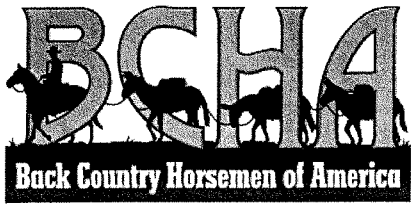
The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Yvette Anderson-Rollins, Director
12784 East Rollins Lane
Springville, IN 47462
812-797-4540
Email: hoosierhorsemen@yahoo.com



KANSAS

1409 Lincoln St, Concordia, KS 66901 785-243-2494 steve.lindsey@lia-ks.com

Honorable Jerry Moran
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Pat Roberts
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Roberts and Senator Moran:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Kansas Chapter to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship. I ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue

Sincerely,

Steve Lindsey

National Director for Kansas
Steven E Lindsey,
June 13, 2015

Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
KYBCH is dedicated to promoting and protecting trails and equestrian access to public lands

April 29, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Kentucky Back Country Horsemen to express our support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

KENTUCKY BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN consist of six chapters throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky that work with the U.S. Forest Service and National Parks land managers to support and maintain trails for not just horsemen but also the general public. We have over 150 members in the Commonwealth.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors. In both the DANIEL BOONE NATIONAL FOREST and THE LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES NATIONAL RECREATIONAL AREA, we have seen the decline in trail conditions due to budget cuts and reduced staff for trail support.

This legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,
Ginny Grulke, Chair
Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
Lexington, Kentucky

Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
KYBCH is dedicated to promoting and protecting trails and equestrian access to public lands

July 6, 2015

Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Rand Paul
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator McConnell and Senator Paul:

I am writing on behalf of Kentucky Back Country Horsemen to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation.

KENTUCKY BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN consist of seven chapters throughout the Commonwealth of Kentucky that work with the U.S. Forest Service and National Parks land managers to support and maintain trails for not just horsemen but also the general public. We have over 150 members in the Commonwealth.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors. In both the DANIEL BOONE NATIONAL FOREST and THE LAND BETWEEN THE LAKES NATIONAL RECREATIONAL AREA, we have seen the decline in trail conditions due to budget cuts and reduced staff for trail support.

This legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Ginny Grulke, Chair
Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
2050 Delong Road
Lexington, Kentucky 40515



Back Country Horsemen
Pigeon River & Beyond/Michigan
A 501©3 Non-Profit Organization
www.bchmi.org

March 16, 2015

Honorable John Moolenaar
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representative Moolenaar:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen Pigeon River & Beyond, to express support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access too many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation.

Sincerely,
Richard Kleinhardt
Richard Kleinhardt
President
6631 East Ashard Road
Clare, Michigan 48617
989-386-2910



Back Country Horsemen
Pigeon River & Beyond/Michigan
A 501(c)3 Non-Profit Organization
www.bchmi.org

June 9, 2015

Honorable Debbie Stabenow
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Stabenow:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen Pigeon River & Beyond to express support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access too many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $320 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Richard Kleinhardt

Richard Kleinhardt
President
6631 East Ashard Road
Clare, Michigan 48617
989-386-2910



Dedicated to keeping America's trails open for all

July 4, 2015

Honorable Thad Cochran
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Roger Wicker
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Cochran and Senator Wicker:

I am writing on behalf of **Back Country Horsemen of Mississippi** to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship. I ask that you please consider becoming a co-sponsor of this important legislation.

Across the United States, our National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

As you most likely know, Mississippi is honored to host six (6) National Forests in our great state, with tens of thousands of acres for Mississippians to enjoy. While our newly established Back Country Horsemen of Mississippi membership is predominately horseback trail riders, we have been fortunate to align with hiking groups and mountain biking groups to collectively further our interests in maintaining and building recreational trails on public lands in Mississippi.

The legislation also will ensure that the Forest Service prioritizes its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help our Mississippi non-profit recreational activities groups (such as the Back Country Horsemen of MS and the North Mississippi Trails Alliance) play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Arcelle,
President, Back Country Horsemen of Mississippi,
(An official state member of Back Country Horsemen of America)
Box 641,
Nesbit, MS 38651

Cc:

- Tim Phelps, President, NMTA (North Mississippi Trails Alliance, an official member of International Mountain Biking Association, IMBA)
- Mark Arcelle, Secretary, NMTA
- Teri Stanton, Secretary/Treasurer, BCHMS
- Larry Jarrett, Desoto County Greenways and representative for MS Hikers Association
- Natalie Sing, Desoto County Greenways
- Caren Briscoe, District Ranger, N. Mississippi Forest Service (Holly Springs and Tombigbee National Forests)
- Randy Rasmussen, Advisor for Public Lands, Back Country Horsemen of America

Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen
519 Good Hope Road
Marshfield, MO 65706
(417) 425-9969

March 23, 2015

Honorable Vicky Hartzler
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representative Hartzler:

I am writing on behalf of ***Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen*** to express support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Sherry L. Copeland

Sherry L. Copeland
Chairman, Board of Directors
Show-Me Missouri Back Country Horsemen

Back Country Horsemen of Montana
P.O. Box 4864
Butte, MT 59701

June 30, 2015

Honorable Steve Daines
United States Senate
320 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Jon Tester
United States Senate
311 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senators Tester and Daines:

I am writing on behalf of the Back Country Horsemen of Montana. We would like to thank you for your support of S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. We saw your press release on National Trails Day and greatly appreciate your stated desire to cosponsor this important bill.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails. Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $320 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation also will ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands. The bill alone, however, will not fully resolve the trail maintenance backlog as innovative solutions and resources are needed to sustain our nation's trails into the future.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and are happy that you have chosen to cosponsor this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Connie Long

Connie Long
Chairman
Back Country Horsemen of Montana
41088 Roberts Rd
Charlo, MT 59824
(406) 644-7889

P.O. Box 19324, Reno, Nevada 89511-1649

February 6, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of the Back Country Horsemen of Nevada, High Sierra Chapter, to express our support for the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, introduced in the last Congress as H.R. 4886. We are hearing from bill sponsors that it may soon be reintroduced into the 114th Congress.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and we ask you to please co-sponsor the bill once it is introduced.

Sincerely,

James Dragoo, Chapter President

Back Country Horsemen of Oregon

February 10, 2015

Randy Rasmussen
Advisor for Public Lands & Recreation
Back Country Horsemen of America
P.O. Box 1367
Graham, WA 98338

Dear Randy

I am writing you to show our support of the Forest Trails Bill. Back Country Horsemen of Oregon realizes that the condition of our historical recreational trails on our federal lands is a national tragedy. It is imperative that congress steps in and instructs our partners the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management that historical recreational trails need to be maintained. Federal agency maintained historical recreational trails should be looked at in the same way as any other historical site with in the United States. Once again Back Country Horsemen of Oregon strongly supports the Forest Trails bill as a good first step to eliminating the huge backlog of trail maintenance needed to maintain the trails on federally controlled lands.

Sincerely,

Jerry Bentz
BCHO President



June 24, 2015

Honorable Phil Roe
Honorable John J. Duncan, Jr.
Honorable Chuck Fleishman
Honorable Scott DesJarlais
Honorable Diane Black
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear District 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 Representatives:

I am writing on behalf of **Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee**, a state organization of the **Back Country Horsemen of America** to express our support for **H.R. 845**, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act. We currently have three chapters in the east and middle Tennessee areas.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only 25% of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors. **Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee** work in Cherokee National Forest, Big South Fork National River and Recreation and Great Smoky Mountains National Park on a regular basis.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest and other trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bobby Mitchell, President **Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee, Inc.**
President **Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen** Chapter

570 Sunnyside Road
Sweetwater, TN 37874
(423) 337-6194 landline

cc: Honorable Cynthia Lummis and Honorable Tim Walz

enc: SABCH 2015 brochure



June 24, 2015

Honorable Lamar Alexander
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Bob Corker
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Alexander and Senator Corker:

I am writing on behalf of **Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee**, a state organization of **Back Country Horsemen of America** to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship. I ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a 25% of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors. My chapter, one of the three in Tennessee, the **Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen** worked 3,842.4 hours of volunteer time, personal mechanical equipment and equine for a value **$93,846.95**. As a state, we volunteered

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Bobby Mitchell, President **Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee, Inc.**
President **Southern Appalachian Back Country Horsemen** Chapter

570 Sunnyside Road
Sweetwater, TN 37874
(423) 337-6194 landline

cc: Michael Enzi (R-WY) and Michael Bennet (D-CO)

enc: SABCH 2015 brochure



Iron Mountain Back Country Horsemen of Virginia
www.ironmountainbch.org

May 13, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: H.R. 845 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of Back Country Horsemen of Virginia, Iron Mountain Chapter, to express our support for H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely, Nancy Sluys- President- Iron Mountain Back Country Horsemen
251 Big Brush Creek Road
Fries, VA 24330
276-744-0277
email- minglewood@surry.net
www.ironmountinbch.org

January 31st, 2015

Honorable Cynthia Lummis
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Honorable Tim Walz
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Representatives Lummis and Walz:

I am writing on behalf of the Back Country Horsemen of Washington (BCHW) to express our support for the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, introduced in the last Congress as H.R. 4886. We are hearing from bill sponsors that it may soon be reintroduced into the 114th Congress.

Across the United States, America's National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails. Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and we ask you to please co-sponsor the bill once it is introduced.

Sincerely,

Darrell Wallace
BCHW Executive Director

June 12, 2015

Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

Honorable Maria Cantwell
United States Senate
Washington D.C. 20510

RE: S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senator Murray and Senator Cantwell:

I am writing on behalf of **Back Country Horsemen of Washington** to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship. I ask that you please consider becoming a cosponsor of this important legislation

Across the United States, our National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. But access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Without immediate action, we will continue to lose access to the great outdoors.

The Act will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by providing new opportunities to expand trail maintenance. The legislation establishes a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails.

The legislation also will ensure that the Forest Service prioritizes its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. Finally, the legislation will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands.

We are pleased to support the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act and thank you for your leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Darrell Wallace
BCHW Executive Director







NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM TRAILS STEWARDSHIP ACT

SUPPORTERS

JULY 2015

America Outdoors Association
American Endurance Ride Conference
American Hiking Society
American Horse Council
American Council of Snowmobile Associations
American Motorcyclist Association
American Quarter Horse Association
Applegate Trails Association
Assoc. of Outdoor Recreation and Education
Back Country Horsemen of America
Back Country Horsemen of Alabama
Back Country Horsemen of Arizona
Back Country Horsemen of California
Back Country Horsemen of Colorado
Back Country Horsemen of Florida
Back Country Horsemen of Idaho
Back Country Horsemen of Kansas
Back Country Horsemen of Michigan
Back Country Horsemen of Mississippi
Back Country Horsemen of Missouri
Back Country Horsemen of Nevada
Back Country Horsemen of North Carolina
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon
Back Country Horsemen of Tennessee
Back Country Horsemen of Washington
Black Hills BCH of South Dakota
Central Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
Continental Divide Trail Coalition
Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trails Partnership
Equine Land Conservation Resource
Friends of Columbia Gorge
Hoosier Back Country Horsemen of Indiana
International Mountain Bicycling Association
Iron Mountain BCH of Virginia
Jackson Hole Conservation Alliance
Kentucky Back Country Horsemen
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
Minnesota Horse Council
Minnesota Trail Riders Association
Montana Outfitters and Guides Association
Montana Wilderness Alliance
Montana Wildlife Federation
National Association of Counties
National Coast Trail Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
National Wildlife Federation
Oregon Council Trout Unlimited
Oregon Equestrian Trails
Oregon Natural Desert Association
Oregon Wild
Pacific Crest Trail Association
Partnership for the National Trails System
Professional Wilderness Outfitters Assn.
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Show-Me Missouri BCH – Tri-Lakes Chapter
Siskiyou Upland Trails Association
Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards
Team Dirt
The Access Fund
The Mountaineers
The Wilderness Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited
Western Governors' Association
Winter Wildlands Alliance
Wyoming Outdoor Council







NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM TRAILS STEWARDSHIP ACT

CONGRESSIONAL CO-SPONSORS

JUNE 2015

SENATE CO-SPONSORS
Michael Enzi (R-WY)
Michael Bennet (D-CO)
John Barrasso (D-WY)
Steve Daines (R-MT)
Jon Tester (D-MT)

HOUSE CO-SPONSORS
Cynthia Lummis (R-WY)
Tim Walz (D-MN)
Mark Amodei (R-NV)
Scott Austin (R-GA)
Brad Ashford (D-NE)
Andy Barr (R-KY)
Dan Benishek (R-MI)
Susan Brooks (R-IN)
Kathy Castor (D-FL)
Matt Cartwright (D-PA)
Jason Chaffetz (R-UT)
Judy Chu (D-CA)
Peter DeFazio (D-OR)
John Delaney (D-MD)
Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)
Susan DelBene (D-WA)
Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA)
Sean Duffy (R-WI)
Jeff Fortenberry (D-NE)
John Garamendi (D-CA)
Tom Graves (R-GA)
Jody Hice (R-GA)
French Hill (R-AR)
Mike Honda (D-CA)
Jared Huffman (D-CA)
John Kline (R-MN)
Raul Labrador (R-ID
Doug Lamborn (R-CO)
Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM)
Michelle Lujan Grisham (D-NM)
Doris Matsui (D-CA)
Jerry McNerney (D-CA)
Mick Mulvaney (R-SC)
Grace Napolitano (D-CA)
Dan Newhouse (R-WA)
Rick Nolan (D-MN)
Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC)
Bill Pascrell (D-NJ)
Stevan Pearce (R-NM)
Collin Peterson (D-MN)
Jared Polis (D-CO)
Reid Ribble (R-WI)
Adam Schiff (D-CA)
Mike Simpson (R-ID)
Eric Stalwell (D-CA)
Glenn Thompson (R-PA)
Mike Thompson (D-CA)
Paul Tonko (D-NY)
Marc Veasey (D-TX)
Peter Welch (D-VT)
Ed Whitfield (R-KY)
Ryan Zinke (R-MT)

Applegate Trails Association • Back Country Horsemen of America
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon • Corvallis-to-the-Sea (C2C) Trail Partnership
Friends of the Columbia Gorge • Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
National Coast Trail Association • Oregon Council Trout Unlimited
Oregon Equestrian Trails • Oregon Natural Desert Association • Oregon Wild
Pacific Crest Trail Association • Siskiyou Upland Trails Association • Team Dirt

June 15, 2015

The Honorable Ron Wyden
United States Senate
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jeff Merkley
United States Senate
313 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

RE: S. 1110 – The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

Dear Senators Wyden and Merkley:

We are writing to express our **support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act**, sponsored by Senators Michael Bennet and Michael Enzi. We urge you to co-sponsor this important legislation.

Across the United States, National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. Yet access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. **Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $314 million, with an additional $210 million needed for annual maintenance, capital improvement and operations**. Failing to address the trail maintenance crisis will result in diminished public access to the great outdoors, increased potential for harm to natural resources, and greater future maintenance costs.

S. 1110 will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by establishing a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails. The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public.

S. 1110 will help outfitters and guides play an increased role in maintaining trails on public lands and it will study other ways to expand trail maintenance at no cost to the Federal government. These solutions are vitally important, especially in an era of declining budgets. Because of these important benefits, **we support S. 1110, and respectfully request that you co-sponsor this essential legislation.**

Sincerely,

Randy Rasmussen
Advisor for Public Lands & Recreation
Back Country Horsemen of America
37326 Soap Creek Road
Corvallis, Oregon 97330

David Calahan
Chairman
Applegate Trails Association
PO Box 105
Jacksonville, Oregon 97530

Jerry Bentz
President
Back Country Horsemen of Oregon
PO Box 543
Veneta, Oregon 97487

Gary Chapman
President
Corvallis-to-the-Sea (C2C) Trail Partnership
PO Box 1562
Corvallis, Oregon 97339

Kevin Gorman
Executive Director
Friends of the Columbia Gorge
522 SW Fifth Avenue, Suite 720
Portland, Oregon 97204

Joseph Vaile
Executive Director
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center
PO Box 102
Ashland, Oregon 97520

Al LePage
Executive Director
National Coast Trail Association
PO Box 11045
Portland, Oregon 97211

Tom Wolf
Chair/Executive Director
Oregon Council Trout Unlimited
22875 NW Chestnut Street
Hillsboro, Oregon 97124

Michael J. Wagner
President
Oregon Equestrian Trails
10117 SE Sunnyside Road, F#101
Clackamas, Oregon 97015

Dan Morse
Conservation Director
Oregon Natural Desert Association
50 SW Bond Street, Suite 4
Bend, Oregon 97702

Steve Pedery
Conservation Director
Oregon Wild
5825 North Greeley
Portland, Oregon 97217

Ian Nelson
Regional Representative
Pacific Crest Trail Association
PO Box 458
Medford, Oregon 97501

Hope Robertson
President
Siskiyou Upland Trails Association
PO Box 901
Jacksonville, Oregon 97530

Trey Jackson
Secretary / OSU Liaison
Team Dirt (IMBA Chapter)
PMB 242
922 NE Circle Blvd., Ste 160
Corvallis, Oregon 97330

For **additional information, please contact Randy Rasmussen, Back Country Horsemen of America** at (541) 602.0713, or quietrecreation@gmail.com



Trail Operations Office

20130 87th Avenue SW • Vashon, WA 98070-6210

(206) 463-9087 (Phone) • trail@pcta.org (E-Mail)

The Honorable David Reichert
U.S. House of Representatives
1127 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 26th 2015

Dear Congressman Reichert,

I am writing to you today to ask you to throw your support behind H.R. 845, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, sponsored by Representatives Cynthia Lummis and Tim Walz. The Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA) is hoping that you might cosponsor this legislation.

As you know, volunteers from the PCTA, and our partners in Washington State, including the Washington Trails Association and the Pacific Northwest Trail Association, generate millions of dollars worth of volunteer effort in the state as well as significant private funding that we raise to support these efforts each year. Along the PCT alone, our volunteers put in over 80,000 hours in 2014, to bring this experience to citizens up and down the west coast and those who visit the trail from across the nation and indeed around the world.

As I have discussed with you and your staff, current funding for the US Forest Service trails program, even bolstered by these volunteer efforts and private funds, is not enough to keep pace with the natural degradation of these travelways that allow the public to experience and benefit from our national forests, as well as for local communities to benefit from the dollars that these trail users leave behind at

a variety of businesses. According to a recent GAO study, only a quarter of Forest Service-managed trails even meet their own maintenance standards. Each year fires and floods make our goal of a well-maintained PCT farther and farther from reality, despite our best efforts.

While it is clear that these needs will require additional public and private investment to resolve, there are a few well-crafted policy changes and internal initiatives that could help to facilitate the use of volunteers for trail work. Some of these are embodied in HR 845. While not a complete solution, the bill would take us a step closer to our goal of trails that make National Forests truly accessible to our citizens. From our talks in the past and the legislation that you have supported, it is clear that you see the benefit of these goals to all Americans. It is with this in mind that we ask that you consider co-sponsoring this legislation.

Thanks you for your attention,

Mike Dawson
Director of Trail Operations

June 26, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry Comm.
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry Comm.
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

We are writing to express our support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, sponsored by Senators Mike Enzi and Michael Bennet, and to respectfully request that you schedule a hearing for this legislation before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee.

S. 1110 addresses a growing crisis facing America's National Forest trails: lack of maintenance. Across the United States, National Forests provide world class recreational opportunities. Access to many of these wonderful lands would not be possible without adequate trails.

Unfortunately, the trail system on our National Forests is in decline. Only a quarter of the trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency is facing a maintenance backlog of more than $500 million. Failing to address the trail maintenance crisis will result in diminished public access to the great outdoors, increased potential for harm to natural resources, and greater future maintenance costs.

S. 1110 will help improve maintenance of our National Forest trail system by establishing a much-needed program to expand the use of volunteers and partner organizations in assisting the Forest Service in maintaining National Forest trails. The legislation will also ensure that the Forest Service is

prioritizing its trail maintenance activities in areas that are most in need of additional work and most important to the public. These solutions are vitally important, especially in an era of declining budgets.

The legislation is supported by over 60 equestrian, sportsmen, conservation, motorized recreation, outfitters and guides, trails, and governmental organizations including the Western Governors' Association, National Association of Counties, America Outdoors Association, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Back County Horsemen of America, and The Wilderness Society.

Further, the bi-partisan legislation is supported by five members of the Senate and 50 members of the House of Representatives.

On behalf of our organizations, and our millions of members and supporters who rely on America's trails, we respectfully request that you schedule a hearing on S. 1110 before the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

America Outdoors Association
American Council of Snowmobile Associations
American Hiking Society
American Horse Council
American Motorcyclist Association
Back Country Horsemen of America
International Mountain Bicycling Association
National Association of Counties
Natural Resources Defense Council
Partnership for the National Trails System
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
The Access Fund
The Wilderness Society
Winter Wildlands Alliance

July 14, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition and Forestry
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

We are writing to support S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, sponsored by Senators Michael Enzi and Michael Bennet.

S. 1110 responds to the lack of adequate maintenance that jeopardizes access to America's national forests. The Forest Service currently faces a trail maintenance backlog of more than $500 million and can only maintain to standard a quarter of the trails relied upon by the public to access our public lands.

S. 1110 will improve trail maintenance by expanding the use of volunteers and partner organizations in maintaining national forest trails, prioritizing trail maintenance activities, and including outfitters and guides in trail maintenance.

The legislation is supported by over 60 organizations representing equestrians, sportsmen, conservation groups, motorized recreation groups, outfitters and guides, trails, and local and state governments. A complete list of supporters is attached to this letter.

On behalf of our organizations, and our millions of members and supporters who rely on America's trails. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Paul Spitler
The Wilderness Society

Ben Pendergrass
American Horse Council

Randy Rasmussen
Back Country Horsemen of America

OFFICES:
Gillette 307-682-6268
Cheyenne 307-772-2477
Casper 307-261-6572
Cody 307-527-9444
Jackson 307-739-9507
D.C. 202-224-3424
website enzi.senate.gov

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-5004

MICHAEL B. ENZI
WYOMING
COMMITTEES:
Budget
Chairman
Finance
Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
Small Business

Statement for the Record of Senator Michael B. Enzi on
S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act,
Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee Hearing
To Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills
10:00 am, Thursday, July 16, 2015
328A Russell

Thank you, Mister Chairman, for holding this hearing today to review and hear testimony on several bills relating to the Forest Service and Forestry. I appreciate your and the Ranking Member's attention to this important issue area. The Forest Service currently manages over 150,000 miles of trails that provide recreational opportunities and access to America's National Forests. The National Forest System helps to fuel a $646 billion recreation industry that supports 6.5 million jobs across the nation. Yet nearly two-thirds of the Forest Service's trails do not receive ongoing maintenance and the Government Accountability Office recently reported the trail upkeep backlog amounts to over half-a-billion dollars. For that reason, I introduced the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act with Senator Bennet and several other colleagues.

This bill addresses the forest trails maintenance backlog by increasing the role of partners and volunteers in trail maintenance. Under the bill, the Secretary of Agriculture is required to establish a strategy modeled after the successful U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service volunteer and partner program and select between nine and fifteen priority areas to incorporate volunteers and increase trail maintenance. This bill also addresses long-term liability issues, clarifies how volunteers with partner organizations are

classified, and authorizes the Secretary to enter into cooperative agreements with states, local governments, tribes, and private entities to address the trail maintenance backlog. These trails offer world class hiking, horseback riding, camping, and other outdoor recreation opportunities and it is vital that volunteers and partners are effectively utilized to maintain the trails system and increase forest access for all Americans.

Well maintained trails are important to everyone wishing to enjoy the special places in America's forests. Due to the maintenance backlog, some outfitters and guides who use trails to provide access and services to visitors have been forced to maintain trails on their own. These operators already pay to operate a business on public lands and the added work on trails, done on a completely voluntary basis, only adds strain to these small businesses. This bill requires a pilot program that will allow outfitters and guides to treat trail maintenance activities as an in-kind donation to offset their fees, increasing maintenance and easing the burden for these businesses.

The coalition supporting this bill includes organizations representing conservation groups, sportsmen, motorized recreation groups, outfitters and guides, equestrians, and local and state governments. It has bipartisan support in both the Senate and the House. I appreciate the Committee including this bill on today's hearing agenda. Thank you Mr. Chair.

MICHAEL F. BENNET
COLORADO

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
FINANCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

WASHINGTON, DC:
[illegible]
COLORADO:
[illegible]

June 10, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Senator Stabenow:

We write to request a hearing for S. 1110, the "National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act." Senators Barrasso, Daines, and Tester are current cosponsors of the bill. S. 1110 requires the Department of Agriculture to significantly increase the role of partners and volunteers to address the trail maintenance backlog in National Forests.

Please contact Allison Connell (4-9165) on Senator Enzi's staff or Laura Sherman (8-5907) on Senator Bennet's staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Michael B. Enzi
U.S. Senator

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator

WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Brian Sandoval
Governor of Nevada
Chairman

James D. Ogsbury
Executive Director

Headquarters:
1600 Broadway
Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

303-623-9378
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C. Office:
400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 376
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402
Fax 202-624-7707

www.westgov.org

June 11, 2015

Honorable Mike Enzi
United States Senate
379A Senate Russell Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Honorable Michael Bennet
United States Senate
261 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Enzi and Senator Bennet:

We are writing in support of your bipartisan legislation -- the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (S. 1110) – that would, if enacted, expand National Forest trail maintenance efforts in the West.

Our highest priority regarding our nation's forests is to improve forest health in order to reduce wildfire threat and improve watersheds and habitat. Congress has provided new tools and programs to facilitate state and private efforts to help the Forest Service improve the health of forests they manage.

Similarly, your bill would facilitate the use of volunteers and guides to help repair and maintain trails on Forest Service lands. In a budget constrained environment, this only makes sense.

The need for a strategy to use non-federal resources to maintain trails is clear. Only a quarter of National Forest trails are maintained to Forest Service standards, and the agency currently faces a $314 million backlog in trail maintenance.

Well maintained Forest Service trails are vital to western states' recreation industry. They are used by hikers, horseback riders, campers, hunters, fisher-folk, and for other outdoor recreation.

Please do not hesitate to call on Western Governors if we can help get your important legislation across the finish line.

Respectfully,

Brian Sandoval
Governor of Nevada
Chairman, WGA

cc: Senator John Barrasso
Senator Steve Daines
Senator Jon Tester

MICHAEL F. BENNET
COLORADO

COMMITTEES:
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION, AND FORESTRY
FINANCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0609

WASHINGTON, DC
[illegible]
(202) 224-5852

COLORADO
[illegible]

June 25, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Senator Stabenow:

I write to request a hearing for S. 1671, the "National Forest Foundation Reauthorization Act." The bill reauthorizes the National Forest Foundation's matching grants program, which provides funding for projects that enhance forest health and outdoor recreation on National Forests and Grasslands.

Please contact Laura Sherman (8-5907) on Senator Bennet's staff if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Michael F. Bennet
U.S. Senator

July 8, 2015

Senator Charles Patrick Roberts

Senator Deborah Ann Stabenow

Dear Senators:

The Friends of the Dillon Ranger District (FDRD) supports the reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation (NFF). FDRD works closely with this organization in achieving our mission of promoting stewardship of the White River National Forest in Summit County through partnerships, volunteer service, education and support. Our projects include trail improvements and maintenance, control of invasive weeds, erosion reduction, litter removal, wildlife habitat restoration, watershed improvements, and campgrounds maintenance. Without the help from the NFF these projects would not be accomplished.

We note the bipartisan support received by Bill H.R. 2394 as passed by the House Agricultural Committee for the reauthorization of the NFF. FDRD believes the rationale for the reauthorization includes the full dimensions of the NFF's work, including ecosystem services, youth engagement, tree-planting programs, volunteer opportunities, ecological studies, awards programs and partnership facilitation and collaboration. A great example of partnership facilitation right here in Summit County is their efforts in leading the Swan River restoration project, a 10 year effort that involves national, state, county and town governmental organizations as well as non-profit groups and private landowners.

The Friends of the Dillon Ranger District requests the support of the Senate Agricultural Committee for the reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation. FDRD highly endorses NFF's activities and requests that the Committee give full consideration for this worthwhile organization.

Sincerely,

Michael Connolly

Executive Director, Friends of the Dillon Ranger District



NORTHEAST WASHINGTON FORESTRY COALITION
www.NewForestryCoalition.org

Senator Charles Patrick Roberts
Senator Deborah Ann Stabenow
via staff email: Sean_Babington@ag.senate.gov and Andrew_Vlasaty@ag.senate.gov

July 12, 2015

Dear Senator Roberts and Senator Stabenow,

The Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition (NEWFC) wishes to express our support for Congressional reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation (NFF). We are pleased at the bipartisan support for H.R. 2394, and encourage members of the Senate Agriculture Committee take action to quickly advance the reauthorization of the NFF.

NEWFC participates in both planning and on-the-ground work in restoration and vegetation management projects on the Colville National Forest. We first organized in the early 2000's, making us one of the longest-lasting forest collaboratives in the country.

NEWFC's goals are to: maintain infrastructure for timber, conserve native ecosystems, increase recreational opportunities, and find common ground between diverse interests on the Colville National Forest. We work to provide consensus recommendations for projects which address our mutual goals by opening communication channels between communities (individuals and organizations) and county, state and federal agencies in ongoing efforts.

NFF has been instrumental in setting the stage for conservation success by providing resources, grants and training to help NEWFC provide effective input, work together and to enhance our relationships with counties and other stakeholders. NFF continues to support our joint monitoring and reporting efforts as well helping us build capacity.

NEWFC has worked with the Colville National Forest to support over 36 project, none of which have been appealed or litigated. The support for our work by the NFF has been a critical part of our success. Members of NEWFC have also benefitted greatly from numerous NFF workshops and trainings including networking and problem-solving with experts and other collaboratives in the region; this has added great value to our work.

Sincerely,

Russ Vaagen

Russ Vaagen, President
Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition

P.O. 52025 • PAB232
Phoenix, AZ 85072-2025
(602) 236-5812
Fax (602) 683-0963
e-mail: john.sullivan@srpnet.com

John F. Sullivan
Deputy General Manager and
Chief Strategic Initiatives Executive

Senator Charles Patrick Roberts
Chairman
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate

Senator Deborah Ann Stabenow
Ranking Member
Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
United States Senate

July 9, 2015

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow,

The Salt River Project (SRP) serves over 1 million electric customers and is the largest water provider in the Phoenix Metropolitan area. I write you to express our support of S.1671 to reauthorize the National Forest Foundation (NFF). We applaud the bipartisan passage of H.R. 2394 in the House and appreciate your prompt consideration of the companion Senate bill.

We have worked very closely and successfully with the NFF on a variety of conservation projects in Arizona that will protect our watersheds, along with the wildlife, recreational, and multi-purpose value of our National Forests. NFF has proven to be an effective and efficient organization that is able to leverage public funds to spur significant private-sector investment and carryout critical on-the-ground forest restoration work.

The NFF supports and facilitates collaborative approaches to forest issues, engaging Americans directly in caring for the public lands that are vital for our environment and economy. In Arizona, we are fortunate to have partners like the NFF who work closely with communities, the U.S. Forest Service, and industry to take action that protects the long-term health of National Forests and the precious water resources that flow from them.

We support S.1671 and urge the Agriculture Committee to favorably report this Bill for consideration by the full Senate.

Thank you for your efforts to reauthorize this important organization. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Lane Dickson in our Federal Affairs office at (202) 898-8089.

Sincerely,

John F. Sullivan

John F. Sullivan
Deputy General Manager
Chief Strategic Initiatives Executive



Polaris Industries Inc.
2100 Highway 55
Medina, Minnesota 55340-9770
763-542-0500
763-542-0599 fax

July 9, 2015

Dear Senator Charles Patrick Roberts:

I am writing on behalf of Polaris Industries Inc. in support of S.1671, specifically in support of reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation (NFF). As you may know, H.R. 2394 received bipartisan support in the House of Representatives, and Polaris Industries is interested in seeing similar strong support for S.1671 passed during the next hearing.

Polaris has had the pleasure of working in partnership with the National Forest Foundation for the past four years. They have been a strong non-profit partner of Polaris, allowing us to support important restoration projects that resonate with our company and our thousands of customers nationwide. Our partnership accomplishments include landscape-scale reforestation and trail stewardship projects on National Forests in Minnesota.

Beyond our partnership accomplishments, I'm aware of the outstanding accomplishments this organization brings to our cherished public lands. The NFF facilitates collaboration to break through litigious forest planning gridlock, supports local stewardship groups, engages the public in caring for their public lands, and implements innovative ecosystems service restoration projects that help sustain our forests into the future. The health of our business – and thousands of other businesses – is closely linked to the health of our public lands. The leadership of the National Forest Foundation is an indispensable resource to protect and enhance our National Forests and Grasslands.

Polaris respectfully requests your support in your leadership positions of the Senate Agriculture Committee for reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation under S.1671.

Thank you for taking Polaris Industries' view into account, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Dana Anderson

Dana Anderson
Senior Community Relations Specialist
Polaris Industries Inc.

July 10, 2015

Then Honorable Pat Roberts
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Roberts:

On behalf of the Student Conservation Association, I am writing to ask for your vote in support of S. 1671, a bill to reauthorize the National Forest Foundation, both in Committee and on the Floor of the United States Senate.

The Student Conservation Association (SCA) is our Nation's oldest and largest youth leadership and conservation service organization, having been founded in 1957. We have enjoyed a partnership with the United States Forest Service for over 50 years engaging America's youth and young adults in both volunteer and paid service opportunities on the incomparable National Forest System.

The National Forest Foundation maintains a series of grant programs that have played an important role in assisting non-profit organizations such as SCA in partnering with the Forest Service to undertake hundreds of projects that provide substantial benefits to the national forests and to the American people who depend on those forests for outdoor recreation, drinking water, wood products, and an array of essential ecological services. The grant programs are run efficiently, responsibly, and in a manner that exemplifies sound stewardship of federal resources. These grant monies also provide the National Forest Foundation with opportunities to leverage private resources that increase the impact of federal monies entrusted to the foundation many times over.

For all these reasons and more, please support S. 1671 and the reauthorization of the National Forest Foundation.

Sincerely

Jaime Berman Matyas
President and CEO

Water Department
City of Aurora
Water Administration
15151 E. Alameda Parkway, Ste. 3600
Aurora, Colorado 80012
303.739.7370

July 15, 2015

Dear Senator Roberts, Ranking Member Stabenow and Honorable Members Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry:

I am writing you today to offer support for S. 1671, The National Forest Foundation Reauthorization Act of 2015, as introduced by Senator Bennet.

Aurora Water is the third largest water utility in the State of Colorado, serving a population of more than 348,000. Our mission is to enhance and protect the quality of life for Aurora citizens by providing safe, dependable and sustainable water, sewer, and storm services, today and into the future. Doing so in a manner that is protective of the environment is a key tenet of that mission. Planning to meet the water supply needs of our customers often involves the protection of the City's watersheds that stretch across some 7 million acres of Colorado geography. A significant portion of these lands belong to the federal, state or local governmental agencies. These watersheds include many ecological zones ranging from tundra to lower altitude riparian corridors along major and minor stream systems.

We have worked with the National Forest Foundation (NFF) in the highly successful Trail Creek (CO) restoration program that was identified as one of fourteen *Treasured Landscapes* sites by the NFF. The NFF was very successful in gathering donors such as Vail Associates, Coca Cola, the Gates Foundation, United States Forest Service (USFS) and of course Aurora Water to complete this $4M project. This outstanding project was recognized by the USFS, and was the recipient of the Chief's Award in 2012.
Aurora Water is now once again working with the NFF on a wetlands restoration at historic Camp Hale, the training site for the 10th Mountain Division. NFF's ability to bring together water utilities, environmental groups and governmental agencies is truly remarkable. It is doubtful that these diverse parties could come together to accomplish this ambitious project without the collaborative leadership of the NFF.

We are asking that you support this valuable organization and it's reauthorization in your committee and when the bill is passed on to the full Senate.

Sincerely,

Marshall P. Brown
Director, Aurora Water

VOLUNTEERS FOR OUTDOOR COLORADO
600 South Marion Parkway
Denver, CO 80209
303.715.1010
voc.org

July 10, 2015

The Honorable Senator Michael F. Bennet
Office of Senator Michael F. Bennet
1127 Sherman St., Suite 150
Denver, CO 80203

RE: National Forest Foundation Reauthorization

Dear Senator Bennet:

On behalf of Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado (VOC) and the many volunteers who help to care for our national forest lands, I applaud you for your leadership in introducing the *National Forest Reauthorization Act of 2015* to ensure the National Forest Foundation (NFF) continues to have the resources it needs to enhance and protect national forests and grasslands.

VOC's long history in volunteer management, volunteer leadership development, and technical capacity has resulted in the engagement of over 100,000 people in well over 800 stewardship projects since VOC's inception in 1984. Building on our experience managing large-scale volunteer projects, we have also developed and implemented a suite of tools and trainings to help land managers and other nonprofits effectively manage their own volunteers and outdoor volunteer events. The volunteer labor force trained and managed by VOC is valued at over $20 million.

Since 2002, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado has received over $1.1 million in funds through the National Forest Foundation (NFF) grant programs. NFF's Matching Award Program has been crucial for us to be able to undertake on-the-ground work on US Forest Service lands throughout the state that otherwise would not get completed with ever-diminishing federal funding. Furthermore, the grant requires that recipients raise a 1:1 private match, thereby significantly leveraging the funds through NFF.

This year, for example, VOC received a NFF Matching Award grant of $47,000. We will match that with $60,305 in private funds. VOC will complete 18 projects with ranger districts in Arapaho-Roosevelt, Pike/San Isabel, Rio Grande and the GMUG National Forests as part of the NFF Matching Award Program. A total of 7875 volunteer hours will be provided, a value of nearly $200,000. Ten of the 18 VOC projects will directly assist in mitigating high use impacts on high priority recreation areas on USFS lands in Colorado – trails that are being loved to death. Two projects will assist with ongoing, important noxious weed removal on areas in the Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest. In 2013, Colorado experienced some of the most devastating floods in the state's history. Six projects will enable VOC volunteers to continue

flood recovery efforts in the Pike/San Isabel National Forest – efforts that will address both watershed health and recreation issues. The NFF funds enable us to recruit volunteers, train technically competent project leadership and crew leaders, work with land management agencies and manage much of the volunteer logistics in the completion of these high priority projects.

I can think of very few grant programs as effective in meeting their objectives as the NFF's Matching Award Program. We urge you to continue your strong voice in support for this program that offers opportunities for organizations like ours to be cost-effective partners with our federal agencies while engaging the public in important acts of stewardship.

I would be happy to provide additional information as you proceed in the re-authorization process.

Most sincerely,



Ann Baker Easley
Executive Director
ann@voc.org
303-715-1010 ext 121



July 15, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The Wilderness Society appreciates the Committee's attention to legislation regarding our national forests, particularly the Tennessee Wilderness Act (S. 755) and the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (S. 1110). Regarding forest management legislation, The Wilderness Society encourages the Senate to focus on legislation that would fix fire suppression funding and provide additional capacity to the agencies that manage our national forests. This is the most important step Congress can take to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management of our national forests, and we appreciate that bipartisan legislation to do so has been introduced in both Chambers.

On behalf of our 500,000 members, we respectfully request that the following comments be included in the hearing record for July 16th, 2015:

S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

The Wilderness Society, together with more than 60 organizations representing equestrians, sportsmen, conservation groups, motorized recreation groups, outfitters and guides, trails, and local and state governments, writes to express our enthusiastic support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, sponsored by Senators Michael Enzi (R-WY) and Michael Bennet (D-CO).

The United States Forest Service manages 158,000 miles of trails that provide a wide array of recreational opportunities and access to America's National Forests. These trails provide world class opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation. National Forest trails provide opportunities for all Americans to enjoy the peace and quiet of the great outdoors. Further, these trails help fuel America's $646 billion recreation industry that supports 6.5 million jobs nationwide.

Yet, America's trails are in decline. The Forest Service currently faces a $314 million backlog in trail maintenance, as well as a $210 million backlog in annual maintenance, capital improvements, and operations. Cost-free proposals to improve National Forest trail maintenance are needed more than ever. The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act will expand National Forest trail maintenance—and increase forest access for all Americans—without adding to the federal deficit.

S. 1110 will improve trail maintenance by expanding the use of volunteers and partner organizations in maintaining national forest trails, prioritizing trail maintenance activities, and including outfitters and guides in trail maintenance. Specifically, S. 1110:

- requires the Forest Service to establish and implement a national strategy to expand the use of volunteers and partners in National Forest trail maintenance. The effort is modeled after a volunteer strategy put in place on National Wildlife Refuges, which has led to great increases in volunteerism;
- requires the Forest Service to identify 9-15 priority areas on National Forest lands across the country for increased trail maintenance. The areas would be selected after public input, and will benefit from the increased maintenance activities;
- establishes a pilot program to allow outfitters and guides to treat their National Forest trail maintenance activities as an in-kind donation to offset fees owed to the federal government. This will lead to increased trail maintenance activities by outfitters and guides.

The Wilderness Society encourages the Committee to advance this bill.

S. 755 – Tennessee Wilderness Act

More than thirty years ago, President Ronald Reagan signed the Tennessee Wilderness Act of 1984, protecting several special areas of the Cherokee National Forest in designating Big Frog, Citico Creek, and Bald River Gorge as wilderness areas. Since that time, several generations of Americans have enjoyed this wilderness for hiking, paddling, hunting and fishing, and future generations will also have access to these wonderful lands and waters.

Today, the committee will hear a bill from Senators Alexander (R-TN) and Corker (R-TN) that would protect an additional 19,556 acres of the Cherokee National Forest by creating the first new wilderness in Tennessee in 30 years and adding additional acreage to five others. The Wilderness Society enthusiastically supports this legislation and encourages the Committee to advance it.

The Cherokee National Forest is considered one of the most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world. S. 755 would protect several ecosystem types within the forest that are in critical need of protection in this region – Appalachian cove, hemlock hardwood and montane oak, among others. It would protect some of the best habitat in the Appalachians for black bear and brook trout, and would better connect existing wild areas and help to ensure that wildlife can travel between the Cherokee National Forest and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The benefits of this designation to the people of Tennessee are many. First, S. 755 will safeguard clean drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people in Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia. Second, the legislation would keep popular outdoor recreation sites intact for hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and other activities currently enjoyed in the area, which will be allowed to continue without change. These new wilderness additions would bolster the state's reputation as a premier outdoor recreation spot, and help bolster the economies of small towns on the edge of the forest that rely on revenue from tourism and outdoor recreation.

These protected lands are part of a robust, sustainable, and growing outdoor recreation and tourism economy that is increasingly important to East Tennessee. According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2012 economic report, the outdoor recreation industry generates $8.2 billion in consumer spending in Tennessee each year and creates 83,000 in direct jobs in the state.

The Wilderness Society has been honored to work with the local coalition in Tennessee that has organized to support this legislation. This bill enjoys overwhelming public support from businesses, organizations, and individuals in local communities. Polls show that 74% of Tennesseans support designating additional Cherokee National Forest land as wilderness. The Wilderness Society encourages the Committee to advance this legislation – which requires no land acquisition this is already federal, publicly owned land – without delay.

S. 1712 – National Forest Small Tracts Act Amendments Act

S. 1712, the "National Forest Small Tracts Act Amendments Act", would amend the Small Tracts Act of 1983 to expand the Forest Service's authority to sell or exchange certain small parcels of National Forest System lands. The authority would allow the Forest Service to undertake some routine conveyances that currently must be handled legislatively. We support the Forest Service's ability to focus resources on high priority landscapes, and the disposal of small, isolated parcels of Forest Service land that no longer possess national forest characteristics can facilitate that. Consequently, we support the intent of S. 1712 and would encourage the Committee to amend the legislation to clarify that the intent of the proposed paragraph (4) refers to National Forest System lands that are surrounded by non-federal lands and that the proposed paragraph (6) should only include cemeteries accessible by existing public roads. Otherwise, the authority could be read to permit the creation of new inholdings within the National Forest System, for example, including lands that are prized for their public access to recreation, wildlife, and watershed values. In addition, the use of the proceeds of any such land sales should, in accordance with existing law, be limited to the acquisition of lands.

S. 1100 – Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015

The Wilderness Society opposes S.1100, the "Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015", which would impose additional restrictions on the use of prescribed fire by the Forest Service. Prescribed fires are an essential tool used by federal, state, and local governments and private landowners to reduce the risk of wildfires and to improve ecosystem, habitat, and watershed health. S.1100 fails to take into account existing procedures for coordination among federal, state and local governments and other stakeholders. It also fails to consider important and often significant diversity of fuels, fire risk, and ecology that exists within counties and across contiguous counties. The result would be to impose additional red tape and discourage the use of appropriate prescribed fire, thereby increasing the risk to our communities and out natural resources. Experts have consistently concluded that more—not less—prescribed fire is necessary to protect our communities and to improve forest and grassland health. In addition, S.1100 could prevent the use of intentionally ignited fires that can be an essential tool protect communities and natural resources from active wildfires. Finally, the liability provisions of S.1100 divert funds away from other Forest Service programs, including those designed to reduce fire-risk, improve recreational opportunities, and protect natural resources.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Alan H. Rowsome
Senior Director of Government Relations for Lands
The Wilderness Society

COMMISSIONER OF CHATTOOGA COUNTY

Post Office Box 211 Summerville, Georgia 30747

Telephone (706) 857-0700
Fax (706) 857-0742

September 25, 2012

Senator Johnny Isakson
31 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Isakson:

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.S.F.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in my county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Accordingly, I write to express my support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Chattooga County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizens' needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually agreed-upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions for you. I can be reached at 706-857-0700 or by e-mail at chattcom@windstream.net.

Sincerely,

Jason Winters
Sole Commissioner
Chattooga County

August 28, 2012

Senator Johnny Isakson
31 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Johnny Isakson

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.SF.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in our county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Therefore, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I write to express our support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Jones County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizens' needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually-agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions for you. I can be reached by phone at 478-447-8525 or by email atPreston.Hawkins@jonescountyga.org

Sincerely,

Joseph Preston Hawkins
Chairman
Jones County

HABERSHAM COUNTY

Office of County Commissioners

555 Monroe Street, Unit 20, Clarkesville, GA 30523
706-839-0200 Fax: 706-839-0219

www.co.habersham.ga.us

October 29, 2012

Senator Johnny Isakson
Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Isakson,

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.SF.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in our county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Therefore, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I write to express our support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Habersham County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizens' needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually-agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact our County Manager, Janeann Allison, if we can answer any questions for you. She can be reached by phone at 706-839-0200 or by email at allison@habershamga.com.

Sincerely,

Lee A. Mulkey
Chairman
Habersham County

Stephens County Board of Commissioners
P.O. Box 386
Toccoa, Georgia 30577
(706) 886-9491
Fax (706) 886-2185

Dean Scarborough, Chairman
Stanley London, Vice-Chairman
Harold Andrews, Commissioner
J.B. Hudgins, Jr., Commissioner
Jonesy Haygood, Commissioner

Phyllis Ayers, County Administrator
Beth Rider, County Clerk
Brian Ranck, County Attorney

September 25, 2012

Senator Johnny Isakson
31 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Isakson,

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.SF.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in our county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Therefore, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I write to express our support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Stephens County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizens' needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually-agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions for you. I can be reached by phone at 706-886-9491 or by email at payers@stephenscountyga.com.

Sincerely,

Dean Scarborough
Chairman
Stephens County

RABUN COUNTY
BOARD of
COMMISSIONERS
OFFICE

25 Courthouse Square
Suite 201
Clayton, Georgia
30525

706-782-5271
Fax: 706-782-7588

rabuncountygov.com

August 21, 2012

Senator Johnny Isakson
31 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Isakson:

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.S.F.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in our county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Therefore, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I write to express our support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Rabun County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizen's needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually-agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions for you. I can be reached by phone at 706-782-5271 ext. 269 or by email at sdarnell@rabuncounty.ga.gov.

Sincerely,

Stanley E. "Butch" Darnell

Stanley E. "Butch" Darnell, Chairman
RABUN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Board Members:
Stanley E. "Butch" Darnell
Chairman
Tom Garrison
Vice Chairman
Katheryn Granberg
Member
Will Nichols
Member
Jimmy Loudermilk
Member
Jim Bleckley
County Administrator
Allyn Stockton
County Attorney
Debra J. Jacobs
County Clerk/CFO

William C. Simonds
Commission Chairman

Earl Johnson
Post I commissioner

Larry Joe Sosebee
Post II Commissioner

Fannin County Board of Commissioners

400 West Main Street, Suite 100
Blue Ridge, Georgia 30513
Telephone: (706) 632-2203
Fax: (706) 632-2507
www.fanninountyga.org

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senate
131 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Isakson,

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forrest Service (U.S.F.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservancy Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest service as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in our county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Therefore, on behalf of the Board of Commissioners, I write to express our support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Fannin County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our budget has continued to tighten, citizens needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of the tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S,F,S, for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact our County Financial Director, Rita Kirby, if we can answer any questions for you. She can be reached by e-mail at rdavis@fannincountyga.org or by phone at 706/258/5104.

Sincerely,

William C. Simonds
Chairman, Fannin County

Bebe Heiskell
Walker County Commissioner

Post Office Box 445
LaFayette, Georgia 30728

September 11, 2012

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senate
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Johnny,

In recent conversations with representatives of The Nature Conservancy and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia, I learned of potential legislation that would allow the sale of pre-determined United States Forest Service (U.SF.S.) tracts that currently have no conservation value. As has been accomplished in other states, the U.S.F.S. has worked with the Nature Conservancy, the Conservation Fund, and local governments to identify lands that add no value to the forest as a whole, and they have proposed selling those properties to fund the purchase of more functional forest lands in Georgia. It is my belief that the specific tracts proposed for sale in my county are best suited for private or local government ownership. Accordingly, I write to express my support for the sale of these pre-identified federal tracts in Walker County.

I am sure you are aware of the budget challenges currently faced by most local governments. While our county budget has continued to tighten, citizens' needs for essential county services have not decreased. I feel the sale of mutually-agreed upon, unproductive Forest Service lands in my county is a creative and attractive option for securing more resources for our local area. The added revenue gained by converting these lands from federal ownership will benefit our local constituents through the County's increased capacity to provide services. Additionally, the sale of these tracts will help the Forest Service avoid unnecessary costs associated with maintaining unproductive and detached properties. This truly is a situation from which everyone can benefit.

I have seen maps of the properties slated by the U.S.F.S. for sale in my county and agree with the tracts that have been identified. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can answer any questions for you. I can be reached by phone at 423-421-6309 or by email at commissioner@walkerga.us.

Sincerely,

Bebe

Sole Commissioner
Walker County

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 9, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
Washington, D.C. 20310-0101

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

I write to request the inclusion of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015, which I introduced on July 9, 2015, in any upcoming hearings regarding the Forestry Title. This bill would allow the U.S. Forest Service to sell small isolated parcels that are disconnected from the core lands of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Proceeds would be invested into improving existing national forest in Georgia.

Please contact PJ Waldrop (4-6602) or Ben Ayres (4-6606) with any questions.

Kindest regards,

Johnny Isakson
United States Senator

David Perdue
United States Senator

Statement for the Record
U.S. Department of Agriculture
Forest Service

Before the
Committee on Agriculture
United States Senate

Concerning
S.1744 the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest
Land Adjustment Act of 2015
July 16, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Forest Service, to provide views on S. 1744 the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015. The Department strongly supports S.1744.

The Bill provides authority for the discretionary sale of any of 30 scattered parcels outside consolidated areas of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. These parcels are isolated, inaccessible and/or encumbered with private uses. They have lost their "national forest" character and no longer warrant federal ownership. S.1744 would facilitate more effective and efficient management. Conveyance of parcels such as these also allow the Forest Service to focus its limited resources on lands with higher resource values and more available for use by the public.

The bill allows the receipts to be used for the purchase of lands within Georgia, from willing sellers, suitable for National Forest purposes. It authorizes conveyance of lands with marginal public values in exchange for lands with some of the highest recreational opportunities and which may also allow public access to larger expanses of National Forest.

The Forest Service worked in close partnership with local governments, conservation and sportsmen organizations, such as The Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and the Georgia Wildlife Federation to identify the tracts proposed for sale. The Forest Service has received numerous letters of support from the affected counties supporting the sale.

The bill contains some minor technical issues that we would like to work with the committee to resolve. This concludes the USDA statement for the record.

July 13, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

We the undersigned organizations respectively request your support for and the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry's consideration of the "Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015" (S. 1744), sponsored by Senators Perdue and Isakson.

Currently, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) owns many tracts in Georgia that have lost their principle value for National Forest purposes and are outliers from the core forest block that exist as small isolated parcels, disconnected from the core lands of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. Intervening growth and development is the primary reason that many of these tracts have lost their historical conservation and recreation value. In fact, managing these tracts for public benefit and use is not the most efficient use of taxpayer money. At the same time, the USFS has identified critical inholdings, edge-holdings, and connections, that if added to the National Forest lands would streamline land management, better protect flora and fauna, and add value to the Forest as a recreational asset.

Senators Perdue and Isakson have championed the "Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015" (S. 1744) to provide a legislative remedy that will allow the sale of these isolated parcels (30 in total; 3,841 acres; as identified as desired disposal by the USFS). The proceeds from the sale of these parcels will go into a federal account that will only allow the USFS to buy critical inholdings from willing sellers. The funds could only be spent inside the existing USFS proclamation boundary in Georgia – they could not be used to "grow" the forest.

This legislation is a pragmatic way to make the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest a better place to recreate by improving opportunities for hunting, fishing and hiking with the consolidation of federal lands. Georgia's lone national forest is a huge economic generator—Georgia ranks 5th nationally in consumer spending on outdoor recreation, with the latest figures from the Outdoor Industry Alliance indicating $23.3 billion was spent in Georgia which generated more than $1 billion in state and local tax revenue.

Additionally, this legislation will put land back on county tax rolls and any land purchased using the revenue generated will buy inholdings from willing sellers. Counties support this idea, because currently these inholdings cost them money due to the services they have to provide to these remote tracts. In addition, it is difficult for the USFS to manage around holes in the core forest blocks.

Please mark-up the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015 at the earliest possible opportunity. Thanks for your consideration of this request and its importance to Georgia.

Sincerely,

Deron Davis
Executive Director
The Nature Conservancy in Georgia

Andrew Schock
Georgia State Director
The Conservation Fund

Robert Ramsey
President
Georgia Conservancy

Curt Soper
Georgia/Alabama State Director
The Trust for Public Land

Mike Worley
CEO
Georgia Wildlife Federation

Carl Riggs
Chairman
Georgia Council of Trout Unlimited

DAVID VITTER
LOUISIANA
DEPUTY WHIP
Small Business and Entrepreneurship
Chairman
Environment and Public Works
Transportation and Infrastructure
Subcommittee Chairman
Judiciary
Homeland Security and
Border Security Subcommittee
Deputy Chairman
Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs

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Website with
E-Mail Access: vitter.senate.gov

July 9, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

I request inclusion of the Kisatchie National Forest Land Conveyance Act (S. 61), which I introduced on January 7, 2015, in any hearing regarding the Forestry Title. This bill would allow a portion, approximately 17.5 acres, of the Kisatchie Forest to be purchased by a group of people who have been leasing camps there for many years. This is a purchase that was first suggested to the camp owners by the Forest Service more than 10 years ago.

Please contact Chris Stanley (8-5040) if you need any more information.

Sincerely,

David Vitter
U.S. Senator



Statement of The Pew Charitable Trusts
Regarding S. 755

Submitted to the
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

For the Record of the
Hearing held on July 16, 2015

The U.S. Public Lands program at The Pew Charitable Trusts seeks to preserve ecologically and culturally diverse U.S. public lands through congressionally-designated wilderness, the establishment of national monuments, and administrative protections. We appreciate the opportunity to submit these views for the record.

S. 755, The Tennessee Wilderness Act

The Pew Charitable Trusts supports S. 755, the Tennessee Wilderness Act, legislation that would permanently protect nearly 20,000 acres within the Cherokee National Forest as wilderness.

Background
Pew's U.S. Public Lands Program has been working in collaboration with local partners to protect portions of the Cherokee National Forest in Eastern Tennessee for almost a decade. The areas being proposed for wilderness were recommended for designation by the United States Forest Service (USFS) in 2004. Senator Lamar Alexander has introduced the Tennessee Wilderness Act four times in consecutive Congresses, and just last year it was unanimously approved by this committee.

Pew appreciates the commitments of Senator Alexander and Senator Bob Corker to champion legislation that would honor the ecological, recreation, and clean water values of the Cherokee Forest, as well as protecting the natural resources that serve as economic drivers for local communities.

Resources
The Southern Appalachians are home to stands of old-growth hardwood, rare in the Eastern United States, and boast one of the most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world. The Cherokee National Forest provides habitat for deer, black bear, bobcat, wild turkey, and even hogs, as well as habitat for flora including bright green mosses and the ubiquitous rhododendron. These lands serve as migratory, breeding, and wintering area for numerous bird species and preserve clean water for brook trout and the otherworldly hellbender – a salamander also affectionately known as a "snot otter."

The Cherokee is a mecca for hikers, hunters, birders, and paddlers. The Bald and Tellico Rivers cut a deep canyon through the tangled pine of existing wilderness areas, and draw kayakers and fly fishermen to their clear waters. This important watershed provides clean water for many Tennesseans, yet only parts of it are safeguarded from uses that might compromise them.

The Forest and its existing wilderness designations honor the spirit of outdoor recreation found in Eastern Tennessee, including preserving portions of the popular Appalachian and Benton MacKaye Trails, as well as viewsheds along the Ocoee River, site of whitewater events during the 1996 Summer Olympics.

Protection of these wild spaces means anglers and fisherman can continue to enjoy crystal clear streams, while hikers and horseback riders can explore myriad footpaths. The designation is good for business, too. According to a 2013 study by the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation in Tennessee generates over $8 billion dollars in consumer spending each year and supports more than 80,000 jobs. Tennessee businesses have championed the bill for that very reason: not only does it support the recreation economy, but it means an improved quality of life for employees.

Current Legislation
The current legislation proposed by Senator Alexander and Senator Corker comes at no cost to the taxpayer and doesn't impact access for those seeking to hunt, fish, hike, camp, paddle, and horseback ride on public lands.

S. 755 would protect nearly 20,000 acres as wilderness, adding acreage to five existing wilderness areas and creating one new wilderness – the Upper Bald River Wilderness. Polling conducted by Ayers, McHenry, and Associates in 2010 shows that these new designations are widely supported locally: 74 percent of Tennesseans support the Act. A multitude of local businesses, outdoor and recreation organizations, and community leaders have endorsed the idea, and every major media outlet in Eastern Tennessee has editorialized in favor of it. The USFS also supports the legislation.

We appreciate the opportunity to submit these views for the committee's consideration. For additional information, please contact Anders Reynolds, Officer, The Pew Charitable Trusts, at 202-540-6767 or areynolds@pewtrusts.org.

Senator Lamar Alexander - Statement for the Record
Senate Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry Legislative Hearing to
Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills

The Tennessee Wilderness Act was first introduced in 2010 to help preserve some of the wildest, most pristine and beautiful areas in East Tennessee.

The legislation, which I introduced with Senator Corker, will designate 19,556 acres in the Cherokee National Forest as "wilderness areas."

Wilderness designation is the highest form of protection we can give to public lands and ensures that they will be preserved for future generations. Designation as a wilderness area will not only better protect ecosystems and watersheds, but also benefit the diverse recreational value of these areas, which is a major part of East Tennessee's economy.

These lands were recommended for wilderness area designation by the U.S. Forest Service as part of their comprehensive 2004 forest plan, which included extensive opportunities for public comment.

It is important to make it clear that these lands are already owned by the federal government and are within the existing boundary of the Cherokee National Forest. As a result, no local tax revenues will be lost by local communities.

Additionally, because these lands have been managed by the Forest Service as Wilderness Study Areas since 2004, there will be no additional cost to the federal government.

I grew up hiking the mountains of East Tennessee, and conserving these areas in our state gives future generations of Tennesseans the same sort of opportunity. This legislation takes important steps toward protecting our natural heritage, and gives the millions of people who visit Tennessee each year an additional reason to come and enjoy our outdoors.

The Tennessee Wilderness Act will help to protect the following lands:

- Creates the 9,038-acre Upper Bald River Wilderness (Monroe County)
- Adds 348 acres to the Big Frog Wilderness (Polk County)
- Adds 966 acres to the Little Frog Wilderness (Polk County)
- Adds 2,922 acres to the Sampson Mountain Wilderness (Washington and Unicoi County)
- Adds 4,446 acres to the Big Laurel Branch Wilderness (Carter and Johnson County)
- Adds 1,836 acres to the Joyce Kilmer-Slickrock Wilderness (Monroe County)

I thank the Committee for considering this important legislation, and I hope the members of the Committee will support this legislation so that it can be considered by the full Senate.

May 6, 2015

Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
133 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington DC 20510

Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

We are writing to express our strong support for The Tennessee Wilderness Act (S. 755), which was introduced by Senators Alexander and Corker and referred to your committee in March. We respectfully request that you favorably report this bill out of your committee as soon as the committee schedule allows.

The Tennessee Wilderness Act would designate nearly 20,000 acres of the Cherokee National Forest as a new wilderness area and additions to existing wilderness units. These forestlands protect critical habitat for native species including black bear, bobcat, brook trout and numerous migratory bird species. Hunting, fishing, white water rafting, horseback riding, and hiking, are just a few of the popular activities that will be enjoyed by local residents and visitors to the area.

The wilderness designated under this proposal is based on the recommendations in the current Cherokee Forest Management Plan and the result of a lengthy public process conducted by the Forest Service. As a result, this bill enjoys broad public support. The Tennessee Wilderness Act has been endorsed by local elected officials, businesses, recreation and conservation groups, and a broad coalition of individual Tennesseans who want to protect these lands. This letter reflects a partial list of some of those many supporters.

The Tennessee Wilderness Act continues the proud local heritage of protecting special places. We urge the Committee to act expeditiously to report the Tennessee Wilderness Act out of committee in the near future. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Victor Ashe
Former Mayor Knoxville, TN
Former US Ambassador to Poland

Joan Ashe
Knoxville, TN

Greg A. Vital
President & CEO, Morning Pointe
Independent Healthcare Properties
Chattanooga, TN

Allen L. McCallie
Member, Miller and Martin, PLLC
Chattanooga, TN

Leon Humphrey
Mayor, Carter County
Elizabethton, TN

Larry Potter
Mayor, Johnson County
Mountain City, TN

Don Barger
Senior Regional Director
National Parks Conservation Association
Knoxville, TN

Greg Lynch
Mayor, Unicoi County
Erwin, TN

William H. Meadows
Previous Past President,
The Wilderness Society

Judge Carroll Ross
Etowah, TN

Donald Box
Past President, Chattanooga Hiking Club
Chattanooga, TN

John Rowland
Past President, Chattanooga Hiking Club
Chattanooga, TN

Stephen Cartwright
Past President,
Benton MacKaye Trail Association
Athens, TN

Albert Waterhouse
Owner, Waterhouse Public Relations
Chattanooga, TN

Paul K. Brock
Community Volunteer
Chattanooga, TN

Michele Dolan
Mayor of Bristol TN
Bristol, TN

Will Skelton
Attorney (Retired)
Knoxville, TN

Doris Gove
Author
Knoxville, TN

Johnny Molloy
Author
Johnson City, TN

Randy Hedgepath
Tennessee State Naturalist
Burns, TN

David Barto
Chairman, Collegedale Tomorrow
Collegedale, TN

Mack Pritchard
Tennessee State Naturalist, Emeritus
Nashville, TN

Jim Pfitzer
Storyteller & Tennessee Treasure
Chattanooga, TN

Michael D. Gray
Storyteller, River City Sessions
Chattanooga, TN

Mike Campbell
Attorney
Chattanooga, TN

Liane B. (Lee) Russell, Ph.D.
Scientist
Oak Ridge, TN

Ronald Shrieves
Emeritus Professor of Finance, UTK
Knoxville, TN

Kim O'Leary
Real Estate Professional
Chattanooga, TN

Dr. Richard Harris
Tellico Plains, TN

Tim and Laura Johnson
Johnson Insurance
Madisonville, TN

Joe and Barbara Penland
Madisonville, TN

Ken Jones
Cherokee National Forest Trail Volunteer
Hiwassee, GA

Pat Byington
Executive Director, Wild South
Asheville, NC

Laura Hodge
Tennessee Wilderness Campaign
Coker Creek, TN

Scotty Bowman
Tennessee Wilderness Campaign
Johnson City, TN

Jacqui Sikora
President, Tennessee Environmental
Health Association
East Tennessee State University

Terry Vail
Assistant Food Service Manager,
EartthFare
Johnson City, TN

Connie Deegan
Naturalist, Johnson City Park and
Recreation
Johnson City, TN

Kate Van Huss
Communty Outreach Manager, EarthFare
Johnson City, TN

Joan Champion
Jenkins Realty
Tellico Plains, TN

Patrick Hawkins
Mayor
Tellico Plains, TN

Greg Newman
Parks and Recreation
Tellico Plains, TN

James Woodall
Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association Chair
Nashville, TN

Business Supporters

Keith Dixon Studios
Owner, Keith Dixon
Jonesborough, TN

Faces by Ren
Owner, Ren Allen
Jonesborough, TN

Bowman Adventures
Owner, Laura Bowman
Johnson City, TN

A+ Full Serve Vending
Owner, Mike Appleby
Gray, TN

Time and Pay
Owner, Steve Sheu
Johnson City, TN

Jerry Greer Photography
Owner, Jerry Greer
Johnson City, TN

Willow Tree Coffee House
Owner, Teri Dosher
Johnson City, TN

Wheatland-Scrapes
Owner, James Wheeler
Johnson City, TN

Roots Rated
Co-owner, Mark McKnight
Chattanooga, TN

A Walk in the Woods
Owner, Vesna Plakanis
Gatlinburg, TN

Wild Birds Unlimited
Chattanooga, TN

Art Instinct
Owner, Hollie Berry
Chattanooga, TN

R&R Fly Fishing
Owners, Ian & Charity Rutter
Townsend, TN

The Farmer's Daughter Restaurant
Owners, Mike Mayo and Ann Keener
Chattanooga, TN

212 Market Restaurant
Owner, Sally Moses
Chattanooga, TN

Iron Mountain Inn B&B
Owner, Vikki Woods
Butler, TN

Winter Sun Studio
Owner, Andrew Nigh
Lookout Mountain, TN

Artifix.com
Owner, Caara Fritz
Chattanooga, TN

Chattanooga Arboretum & Nature Center
Jean Lomino, Exec. Director
Chattanooga, TN

Sunpeak Properties
Owner, Charlene Hodgin
Tellico Plains, TN

The Crash Pad
Owners, Max Poppel and Dan Rose
Chattanooga, TN

Parker & Sons Shooting Supply
Strawberry Plains, TN

Kayaking Plus
Mark Parker
Strawberry Plains, TN

Rock/Creek
Co-owner, Dawson Wheeler
Chattanooga, TN

Little River Trading Co.
Manager, Tim Patterson
Maryville, TN

Outdoors, Inc.
Owner, Joe Royer
Jackson & Memphis, TN

River Sports Outfitters
Owner, Ed McAlister
Knoxville, TN

Nantahala Outdoors Center
CEO, Sutton Bacon
Bryson City, NC

Push Hard Lumber Co.
Owner, Rudd Montgomery
Signal Mountain, TN

N. Wilhite Designs
Owner, Nancy Wilhite
Sweetwater, TN

A Carroll GIS
Owner, Andrew Carroll
Chattanooga, TN

Second Site, LLC
Co-Founder, Andrew Carroll
Chattanooga, TN

Disc Exchange
Owner, Allan Miller
Knoxville, TN

Rose Bruce Graphics & Design
Owner, Rose Bruce
Gallatin, TN

Mountain Trail Press
Owner, Jerry Greer
Johnson City, TN

Blue Ridge Mountain Sports
CEO and President, Jeff Smith
Charlottesville, VA

Tellico Kats Deli
Owners, Kellye & Tommye Foss
Tellico Plains, TN

Tellico Grains Bakery
Owner, Stuart Shull
Tellico Plains, TN

Citico Wildlife Wilderness
Owner, Cleve Tedford
Tellico Plains, TN

Lavoie Graphics
Owner, Rick Lavoie
Tellico Plains, TN

Windhorse Center
Owner, Barbara Myerson
Tellico Plains, TN

Tellico Art Center
Owner, Sandra Pyron
Tellico Plains, TN

Outpost Pavillion
Owner, Jim DeBarnardi
Tellico Plains, TN

Topiary Joe
Owner, Joe Kyte
Tellico Plains, TN

Town Square Café
Owner, Randy Martin
Tellico Plains, TN

Timeless Treasures
Owner, Terri Houston
Tellico Plains, TN

Tellico Vacation Rentals
Owner, Sandra Pyron
Tellico Plains, TN

Cherohala Biker Gear
Owner, Kristie Frances
Tellico Plains, TN

Scott Street Gallery
Owner, Sheila Holbro
Tellico Plains, TN

Tellico Cabins at Highlands Bluff
Owner, Doug Smith
Tellico Plains, TN

Guide to Tellico Plains
Owner, Judy Lavoie
Tellico Plains, TN

Sunsite Productions
Owner, Barry Hodgin
Tellico Plains, TN

Charles Hall Museum
Tellico Plains, TN

Jenkins Realty
Owner/Broker, Corrina Ashe
Tellico Plains, TN

Coker Creek Village
Director, Cameron Atchley
Coker Creek, TN

Seven Sisters
Owner, Phil Harrold
Coker Creek, TN

Mountain Creek Hideaway
Owner, Bo Bell
Coker Creek, TN

Lil Country Store/Coker Creek Storage
Owner, Betty McRee
Coker Creek, TN

Organizations

Southern Appalachian Backcountry Horsemen
President, Judy Hadorn

Campaign for America's Wilderness
Pew Environment Group
Director, Mike Matz

Benton MacKaye Trail Association
Dick Evans, President

Chattanooga Hiking Club
Elizabeth O'Conner, President

Partners of the Cherokee National Forest
Executive Director, Amy Jendrek
Newport, TN

Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards
Director, Bill Hodge
Coker Creek, TN

Southern Environmental Law Center
David Carr, General Counsel

Tennessee Ornithological Society
Melinda Welton, Conservation Policy Committee Chair

Tennessee Citizens for Wilderness Planning
Executive Director, Sandra Goss
Oak Ridge, TN

The Wilderness Society
President, Jamie Williams
Washington, DC

Cherokee Forest Voices
Executive Director, Cathleen Murray
Johnson City, TN

Smoky Mountains Hiking Club
Ray Payne, Conservation Committee Chairman
Knoxville, TN

Cherokee Hiking Club
Secretary, Richard Foster
Benton, TN

Christians for the Mountains
Bob Marshall, Treasurer

Tennessee Chapter, Sierra Club
Vice Conservation Chair, Scott Banbury
Knoxville, TN

Tennessee Parks & Greenways Foundation
President and Executive Director,
Kathleen Williams
Nashville, TN

Outdoor Chattanooga
Executive Director, Philip Grymes
Chattanooga, TN

Wild South
Patrick Byington, Executive Director
Asheville, NC

Wild Trails
Executive Director, Randy Whorton
Chattanooga, TN

American Whitewater
National Stewardship Director,
Kevin Colburn
Sylva, NC

Tennessee Scenic Rivers Association
President, Charlie Wilkerson
Nashville, TN

Southwings
Executive Director, Hume Davenport
Asheville, NC

Cumberland Trail Conference
Chairman of Board, Ray Garrett
Crossville, TN

Conservation Alliance
Executive Director, John Sterling
Bend, OR

Tennessee Environmental Council
Executive Director, John McFadden
Nashville, TN

Tennessee Trails Association
President, Millette Jones
Nashville, TN

Tennessee Clean Water Network
Executive Director, Renee Victoria Hoyos
Knoxville, TN

Watauga Watershed Alliance
President, Dennis Shekinah
Mountain City, TN

American Hiking Society
President, Dr. Greg Miller
Silver Spring, MD

Chota Canoe Club
Russell O. Decastongene, Board of Officers
Knoxville, TN

East Tennessee Whitewater Club
Secretary, Jimmy Groton
Oak Ridge, TN

Tennessee American Water Co.
Government Affairs, Kino Becton
Chattanooga, TN

ConservAmerica
President for Government & Political
Affairs, David Jenkins
Sturgis, MI

Tennessee Overhill Heritage Association
Executive Director, Gerald Hodge
Etowah, TN

Tennessee Aquarium Conservation Institute
Director and Chief Research Scientist,
Dr. Anna George
Chattanooga, TN

CC: Senator Lamar Alexander
Senator Bob Corker



July 15, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts, Chairman
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

The Wilderness Society appreciates the Committee's attention to legislation regarding our national forests, particularly the Tennessee Wilderness Act (S. 755) and the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act (S. 1110). Regarding forest management legislation, The Wilderness Society encourages the Senate to focus on legislation that would fix fire suppression funding and provide additional capacity to the agencies that manage our national forests. This is the most important step Congress can take to increase the pace and scale of forest restoration and management of our national forests, and we appreciate that bipartisan legislation to do so has been introduced in both Chambers.

On behalf of our 500,000 members, we respectfully request that the following comments be included in the hearing record for July 16th, 2015:

S. 1110 – National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act

The Wilderness Society, together with more than 60 organizations representing equestrians, sportsmen, conservation groups, motorized recreation groups, outfitters and guides, trails, and local and state governments, writes to express our enthusiastic support for S. 1110, the National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act, sponsored by Senators Michael Enzi (R-WY) and Michael Bennet (D-CO).

The United States Forest Service manages 158,000 miles of trails that provide a wide array of recreational opportunities and access to America's National Forests. These trails provide world class opportunities for hiking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation. National Forest trails provide opportunities for all Americans to enjoy the peace and quiet of the great outdoors. Further, these trails help fuel America's $646 billion recreation industry that supports 6.5 million jobs nationwide.

Yet, America's trails are in decline. The Forest Service currently faces a $314 million backlog in trail maintenance, as well as a $210 million backlog in annual maintenance, capital improvements, and operations. Cost-free proposals to improve National Forest trail maintenance are needed more than ever. The National Forest System Trails Stewardship Act will expand National Forest trail maintenance—and increase forest access for all Americans—without adding to the federal deficit.

S. 1110 will improve trail maintenance by expanding the use of volunteers and partner organizations in maintaining national forest trails, prioritizing trail maintenance activities, and including outfitters and guides in trail maintenance. Specifically, S. 1110:

- requires the Forest Service to establish and implement a national strategy to expand the use of volunteers and partners in National Forest trail maintenance. The effort is modeled after a volunteer strategy put in place on National Wildlife Refuges, which has led to great increases in volunteerism;
- requires the Forest Service to identify 9-15 priority areas on National Forest lands across the country for increased trail maintenance. The areas would be selected after public input, and will benefit from the increased maintenance activities;
- establishes a pilot program to allow outfitters and guides to treat their National Forest trail maintenance activities as an in-kind donation to offset fees owed to the federal government. This will lead to increased trail maintenance activities by outfitters and guides.

The Wilderness Society encourages the Committee to advance this bill.

S. 755 – Tennessee Wilderness Act

More than thirty years ago, President Ronald Reagan signed the Tennessee Wilderness Act of 1984, protecting several special areas of the Cherokee National Forest in designating Big Frog, Citico Creek, and Bald River Gorge as wilderness areas. Since that time, several generations of Americans have enjoyed this wilderness for hiking, paddling, hunting and fishing, and future generations will also have access to these wonderful lands and waters.

Today, the committee will hear a bill from Senators Alexander (R-TN) and Corker (R-TN) that would protect an additional 19,556 acres of the Cherokee National Forest by creating the first new wilderness in Tennessee in 30 years and adding additional acreage to five others. The Wilderness Society enthusiastically supports this legislation and encourages the Committee to advance it.

The Cherokee National Forest is considered one of the most biologically diverse temperate forests in the world. S. 755 would protect several ecosystem types within the forest that are in critical need of protection in this region – Appalachian cove, hemlock hardwood and montane oak, among others. It would protect some of the best habitat in the Appalachians for black bear and brook trout, and would better connect existing wild areas and help to ensure that wildlife can travel between the Cherokee National Forest and Great Smoky Mountains National Park.

The benefits of this designation to the people of Tennessee are many. First, S. 755 will safeguard clean drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people in Tennessee, North Carolina and Georgia. Second, the legislation would keep popular outdoor recreation sites intact for hunting, fishing, hiking, camping and other activities currently enjoyed in the area, which will be allowed to continue without change. These new wilderness additions would bolster the state's reputation as a premier outdoor recreation spot, and help bolster the economies of small towns on the edge of the forest that rely on revenue from tourism and outdoor recreation.

These protected lands are part of a robust, sustainable, and growing outdoor recreation and tourism economy that is increasingly important to East Tennessee. According to the Outdoor Industry Association's 2012 economic report, the outdoor recreation industry generates $8.2 billion in consumer spending in Tennessee each year and creates 83,000 in direct jobs in the state.

The Wilderness Society has been honored to work with the local coalition in Tennessee that has organized to support this legislation. This bill enjoys overwhelming public support from businesses, organizations, and individuals in local communities. Polls show that 74% of Tennesseans support designating additional Cherokee National Forest land as wilderness. The Wilderness Society encourages the Committee to advance this legislation – which requires no land acquisition this is already federal, publicly owned land – without delay.

S. 1712 – National Forest Small Tracts Act Amendments Act

S. 1712, the "National Forest Small Tracts Act Amendments Act", would amend the Small Tracts Act of 1983 to expand the Forest Service's authority to sell or exchange certain small parcels of National Forest System lands. The authority would allow the Forest Service to undertake some routine conveyances that currently must be handled legislatively. We support the Forest Service's ability to focus resources on high priority landscapes, and the disposal of small, isolated parcels of Forest Service land that no longer possess national forest characteristics can facilitate that. Consequently, we support the intent of S. 1712 and would encourage the Committee to amend the legislation to clarify that the intent of the proposed paragraph (4) refers to National Forest System lands that are surrounded by non-federal lands and that the proposed paragraph (6) should only include cemeteries accessible by existing public roads. Otherwise, the authority could be read to permit the creation of new inholdings within the National Forest System, for example, including lands that are prized for their public access to recreation, wildlife, and watershed values. In addition, the use of the proceeds of any such land sales should, in accordance with existing law, be limited to the acquisition of lands.

S. 1100 – Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015

The Wilderness Society opposes S.1100, the "Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015", which would impose additional restrictions on the use of prescribed fire by the Forest Service. Prescribed fires are an essential tool used by federal, state, and local governments and private landowners to reduce the risk of wildfires and to improve ecosystem, habitat, and watershed health. S.1100 fails to take into account existing procedures for coordination among federal, state and local governments and other stakeholders. It also fails to consider important and often significant diversity of fuels, fire risk, and ecology that exists within counties and across contiguous counties. The result would be to impose additional red tape and discourage the use of appropriate prescribed fire, thereby increasing the risk to our communities and out natural resources. Experts have consistently concluded that more—not less—prescribed fire is necessary to protect our communities and to improve forest and grassland health. In addition, S.1100 could prevent the use of intentionally ignited fires that can be an essential tool protect communities and natural resources from active wildfires. Finally, the liability provisions of S.1100 divert funds away from other Forest Service programs, including those designed to reduce fire-risk, improve recreational opportunities, and protect natural resources.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,



Alan H. Rowsome
Senior Director of Government Relations for Lands
The Wilderness Society



The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

July 20th, 2015

Dear Senator Shaheen:

On behalf of the Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC) and our more than 100,000 members, supporters, and volunteers, including over 12,000 in New Hampshire alone, thank you for your leadership in introducing the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015*.

As the oldest conservation and recreation organization in the country, AMC's mission is to "promote the protection, enjoyment, and understanding of the mountains, **forests**, waters, and trails of the Appalachian region." The carbon sequestration capacity of these forests are a critical resource as we work to address climate change, and your bill which offers both incentive contracts and easement agreements would provide another important avenue for forest landowners to ensure that keeping their forest as forest is financially viable.

In addition to sequestering carbon, the co-benefits of keeping forests as forests are many. Our forests enhance water and air quality, provide recreational opportunities, and represent important wildlife habitat. And in a state like New Hampshire—the second most forested state in the nation—forests are intrinsic to the state's character, economy, and quality of life.

AMC is proud to support the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015*, and we look forward to working with you to ensure its passage.

Sincerely,

Susan Arnold

Susan Arnold, Vice President for Conservation

Main Headquarters: 5 Joy Street • Boston, MA 02108-1490 • 617-523-0636 • outdoors.org
Regional Headquarters: Pinkham Notch Visitor Center • 361 Route 16 • Gorham, NH 03581-0298 • 603 466-2721
Additional Offices: Bretton Woods, NH • Greenville, ME • Portland, ME • New York, NY • Bethlehem, PA

July 16, 2015

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen,

The undersigned members of the Forest-Climate Working Group are writing to commend your leadership through development of the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015*. The Forest-Climate Working Group represents a broad range of interests across the U.S. forest sector, including private landowners, forest products manufacturing, conservation non-profits, carbon interests, and state government. We seek to promote U.S. forests, including working forests and forest products as a powerful tool to capture carbon and provide essential climate mitigation benefits.

America's forests currently sequester more than 13 percent of U.S. carbon emissions every year—representing one of the Earth's most important net carbon sinks. However, data from the 2010 Resources Planning Assessment indicate that U.S. private forests, which provide the majority of forest carbon capture in the U.S., are at risk from development pressures and climate-driven stressors like fire, pests, and disease.

If enacted, the Forest Incentives Program would provide important tools to help keep forests as forests and grow the contribution of private forests and forest products to reducing carbon emissions and mitigating climate change. Your well designed program would fill an important niche in the suite of tools and incentive opportunities available to private forest owners, complementing other federal authorities.

We look forward to working with you further on this important issue.

Sincerely,

American Forests
American Forest Foundation
C2I, LLC
CarbonVerde
Forest Guild
Green Diamond Resource Company
Hardwood Federation
L&C Carbon LLC
National Alliance of Forest Owners
Pinchot Institute
Plum Creek
Potlatch
Society of American Foresters
Sonen Capital
The National Association of University Forest Resources Programs
The Trust for Public Land
Washington Forest Protection Association
Weyerhaeuser

JEANNE SHAHEEN
NEW HAMPSHIRE

SUITE SH-506
HART BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20510
(202) 224-2841

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 9, 2015

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Agriculture,
Nutrition, & Forestry
328A Russell Senate Office Bldg
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Roberts and Ranking Member Stabenow:

I write to respectfully request that the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry consider my legislation, the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015* (S.1733). This bill would allow private forest owners to maximize the value of their land, keep our forests intact and promote sustainable forestry practices that protect the environment. The bill also supports rural economies by promoting the use of biological products, such as wood, in commercial buildings.

Please contact Marissa Serafino (4-8412) with any questions.

Thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

July 23, 2015

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen:

Thank you for your efforts to keep forests as forests, improve forest management, and provide incentives for building with wood through the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015*. The New England Forestry Foundation was formed over 70 years ago to conserve the region's forests and has just recently initiated an effort to increase the use of wood in buildings through a program we are calling "Build It with Wood" (see attached) – so we share a common purpose.

Just last year, we released a summary report on a project we called "The Path to Sustainability" (www.newenglandforestry.org/our-initiatives/forestry-report). It synthesizes the most important findings from a series of 11 technical reports on the real potential of New England's forests. For example, we could double wood production in New England by practicing better silviculture. We could also use an additional 402,940,000 board feet equivalents in building construction here in New England, the equivalent of taking three quarters of a million vehicles off the road (see www.newenglandforestry.org/images/forestry_report/9_The_Benefits_of_Substituting_Wood_for_Other_Construction_Materials_092214.pdf). Please use these materials, all available at the New England Forestry Foundation's website, www.newenglandforestry.org, if they can be of use in supporting your efforts.

If enacted, the Forest Incentives Program would provide important tools to help keep forests as forests and grow the contribution of private forests and forest products in sequestering carbon. Your well designed program would fill an important niche in the suite of tools and incentive opportunities available to private forest owners, complementing other federal authorities.

We look forward to working with you further on this important issue. I welcome the opportunity to meet with you and your staff to review the progress we have made so far in Build it with Wood and to discuss where we are going and how we might integrate our momentum with your legislative interests.

Sincerely,

Robert Perschel, Executive Director
New England Forestry Foundation



Build It With Wood: The Green Carbon Pump

Organizational Background

For 70 years, New England Forestry Foundation has led conservation and sound management of the region's forests. Our focus on innovation has enabled us to conserve more forested acres than any other nonprofit organization in New England. We hold conservation easements on more than 1,145,000 acres, and helped inspire the era of large easement conservation through our Pingree Forest Partnership. We also own 150 community forests comprising more than 26,000 acres where we provide the public with opportunities for forest recreation and demonstrate sustainable forest management.

The need for our work today is greater than ever; according to Harvard Forest's Wildlands and Woodlands project in the next 20 years all six New England states are expected to experience forest loss at rates ranging from 20% to 60%. In response, NEFF is piloting several new approaches to change the dynamics of forest use and management at a region-wide scale, increase the rate of land conservation activities, and improve public understanding of the importance and potential benefits of sustainable forest management.

In this concept note, we discuss a pilot integrated science and policy initiative at a regional scale replicable at the national or even global scale that will increase demand for local forest products and help drive forest conservation, while integrating with developing global governance frameworks for climate change policy.

Statement of Need

Public policy to address global climate change is advancing at regional, national and international scales, and there is growing belief that a global climate deal will be completed in Paris in late 2015. Climate policy includes the role of forests in carbon sequestration. For example, both policy from the Northeast Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and forest carbon purchases funded through the State of California's Air Resources Board are likely to have impacts on energy infrastructure, land development, demand for forest products, and forest carbon management.

However, the current focus in global efforts on protection of tropical forests and afforestation of non-forested regions could result in overlooking existing natural forests and consequential losses to both long term climate stability and sustainable forest management. NEFF believes there is a critical role for existing natural forests to help reduce peak carbon levels, which could also serve as a mechanism for lowering atmospheric carbon levels once energy systems are decarbonized. This role is not well articulated in current climate debates.

Program Description

NEFF is leading a multi-stakeholder effort titled *Build It With Wood: The Green Carbon Pump,* to re-frame forest management in global climate change discussions and policy by piloting a new, nationally-significant approach at the New England scale. As the leading regional forestry organization in New England, NEFF is uniquely positioned to make a region-wide impact in the overall conception about how to use forests in addressing climate change. The core approach of this project is to remove excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere by expanding and improving use of wood products in buildings. We seek to build policy and incentives that will encourage society to harvest trees using the highest silvicultural standards, store a substantial portion of the wood harvested as long-lived wooden buildings and long-term products that sequester carbon, and re-grow the forest to start the cycle again and pump carbon from the atmosphere. Once the economy is decarbonized, such a program can actively lower atmospheric carbon levels and in the meantime it can help reduce future peak levels. The project will also provide benefits for rural economic opportunity, and for the quality and cost of urban affordable housing, helping unite urban and rural constituencies in support of improved forest management and enhanced conservation.

New England is the most forested region in the nation and includes three of the four most densely populated states, with major research and education hubs. These qualities make the region an ideal location to pilot such an effort that links the forest to construction practices, so that the results of the pilot effort could provide useful lessons for operationalizing the process at a global scale by the mid-2020s. The effort will have the fringe benefit of necessarily bringing greater communications and unity between areas of forest production (northern New England) and areas of greatest forest product use in long-lived infrastructure (metro Boston and other urban centers).

Building on our recent report *New England Forests: The Path to Sustainability* and communications research commissioned by NEFF, we will make the case for the Green Carbon Pump to urban, suburban and rural constituencies. We'll also identify and begin to address key policy needs and opportunities that support continued sustainable forest management and expanded use of wood products, and evaluate gaps in existing scientific knowledge that may need to be filled to fully assess the benefits of the project. NEFF is in a unique position to discuss forestry with wood producers in northern New England and wood consumers in and around Boston (a significant market for forest products) and we have credibility with both communities. To help promote the use of wood for buildings we will form partnerships with architects, engineers, and unions and use those connections to advance public incentives for wood construction.

While approximately 90% of one- and two–family residential buildings are made from wood, there is an opportunity to use an additional 65 million board feet in New England new homes annually. There is an even greater opportunity to use more wood in commercial and public buildings, where steel and concrete dominate as building materials. With no change in building codes or construction techniques, New England could increase the use of wood in commercial and public structures two and one-half fold, for a total of an additional 400 million board feet annually. Not only will more wood construction support the local forest-based economy, it will store carbon and reduce the use of more energy-intensive building materials, driving even greater reductions in the emission of greenhouse gases.

By managing forests toward larger timber and using the wood in long-lived infrastructure (i.e. buildings, bridges and other structures), we will create a continuing flow of carbon out of the atmosphere on a long term basis. This differs from many other approaches to forests and carbon in that most approaches evaluated to date either look at afforesting currently unforested regions such as the Sahara or at schemes to reduce clearing and conversion of forest land. The former produces at best a pulse of carbon removal, while the latter is vital in reducing current and future emissions of carbon, but does not provide a long-term mechanism for removing excess carbon already in the atmosphere. At this point it seems likely that at some time in the future we will have a decarbonized energy system, but carbon concentrations that are too high for a desirable long-term equilibrium temperature.

Additional societal benefits of Build It With Wood: The Green Carbon Pump include: an improved public perception of forestry; expanded use of wood and new wood technologies in housing, producing reduced construction costs and improved building quality; new markets for forest products; enhanced forest management toward true sustainability (e.g. new products and markets for lower quality timber, such as laminated strand lumber or delta strand lumber); preservation of current ecosystem services from forest lands (air quality improvement, water quality improvement, recreation and wildlife); and improvement of rural community economies.

Over the next three years NEFF plans to facilitate a detailed feasibility study and pilot of the idea — developing the policy, science, and communications products needed to make it reality and delivering a strong pilot partnership and documented approach in one municipality to advance use of wood in buildings. Between the region's expansive managed forests and its strong environmental consciousness, NEFF feels that now is the time for New England to implement Build It With Wood: The Green Carbon Pump, and pilot a new approach to sustainability for other cities, states, and even countries.

NH AUDUBON
Protecting our environment since 1914

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Managed by NHA in partnership with Eversource, the NH Fish & Game Department, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

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84 Silk Farm Road
Concord, NH 03301
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NEWFOUND CENTER
50 North Shore Road
PO Box 142
Hebron, NH 03241
Phone 603-744-3516

23 July 2015

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senate
506 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Shaheen,

I am writing on behalf of New Hampshire Audubon to thank you for your leadership in developing the *Forest Incentives Program Act of 2015*. New Hampshire Audubon is a statewide non-governmental organization dedicated to protecting New Hampshire's environment for wildlife and for people. As you are well aware, forest resources make important contributions to the economy, environment, and quality of life in our State. As you also know, New Hampshire's forests and the wildlife populations they support are already experiencing the effects of climate change driven by increasing atmospheric carbon concentrations.

Enactment of the Forest Incentives Program would provide effective tools to prevent loss of forests to other land uses and enhance the ability of forest landowners to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate climate change. As one of the most heavily forested states in the nation, New Hampshire can play an important role in sequestering carbon emissions and can benefit directly from the tools in the proposed Program.

Thank you again for your leadership on this critical issue. We look forward to working with you further on this and other matters of importance to New Hampshire.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Bartlett
President

Eastern Pennington County Cooperative Grazing District

23954 Recluse Road
Philip, SD 57567
605-859-2144
cantrell@gwtc.net

July 10, 2015

Dear Senator Thune,

The board of directors of the Eastern Pennington County Cooperative Grazing District would like to express our approval of the Prescribed Burn Approval Act of 2015 you have introduced to Congress regarding prescribed burns on federal lands. We represent members on the Buffalo Gap National Grasslands in South Dakota who hold grazing permits throughout the Wall Ranger District. Our members own private property which is highly intermingled with Forest Service land and we are greatly concerned with Forest Service policy when implementing prescribed burns on federal pastures which are next to private pastures or in some cases private property such as ranch headquarters. Your bill would insure collaboration with state government and local fire officials if the Grassland Fire Danger Index indicates a high fire danger. We also appreciate language to make federal agencies liable when private property damage does occur. Forest Service policy does not even address this issue in any timely or common sense manner as Grand River permittees can attest to.

We have seen recently, with the Pautre Fire and also the Cold Brook Fire, the devastation that can be caused when these burns get out of control and while we know that the Forest Service feels they are taking every precaution necessary to minimize risks, requiring extra collaboration and approval from other interested parties and requiring accountability if a burn causes private property damage just makes sense. Again, we appreciate this bill being introduced and support it 100%.

Wayne Fortune, President
Clay Schaack, Director
Richard Papousek, Director
Shaun Ruland, Director
Gary Williams, Director

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

JULY 16, 2015

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
Legislative Hearing to Review Pending Forest Service and Forestry Related Bills
Thursday, July 16, 2015
Questions for the Record
Under Secretary Robert Bonnie

Chairman Pat Roberts

1. As drafted, would S. 1100 allow for the Federal government to pay claims retroactively for damages caused by escaped prescribed burns that have occurred in prior years? What other programs at USDA, if any, could assist private landowners for this type of disaster?

   Answer: S. 1100, as drafted, will not allow the Federal government to pay claims retroactively for damages caused by prescribed burns that occurred in the past.

   The USDA has several programs that can be utilized by private landowners impacted by escaped prescribed burns, including:
   - The Livestock Forage Program (LFP) provides compensation to eligible livestock producers that have suffered grazing losses due to drought or fire on land that is native or improved pastureland with permanent vegetative cover or that is planted specifically for grazing;
   - The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) in which individuals can receive funds to mitigate the impacts of disasters;
   - Emergency Assistance for Livestock, Honeybees, and Farm-Raised Fish (ELAP) which provides emergency assistance to eligible producers of livestock, honeybees and farm-raised fish for losses due to disease, adverse weather, or other conditions, such as blizzards and wildfires, not covered by LFP;
   - Emergency Farm Loans are available to help producers recover from production and physical losses due to drought, flooding, other natural disasters, or quarantine; and
   - The Emergency Conservation Program (ECP) provides funding and technical assistance for farmers and ranchers to restore farmland damaged by natural disasters and for emergency water conservation measures in severe droughts.
   - Tree Assistance Program for Orchardists and Nursery Tree Growers (TAP) provides financial assistance to qualifying orchardists and nursery tree growers to replant or rehabilitate eligible trees, bushes and vines damaged by natural disasters occurring on or after Oct. 1, 2011.

2. S. 1100 authorizes Federal liability for damages to private property caused by a prescribed burn. What State laws, if any, prohibit this liability? Are there other Federal authorities outside of the Federal Tort Claims Act that affect USDA's liability?

   Answer: The answer to this question depends on how S. 1100 determines the Federal Government's liability with regard to prescribed burns. If the act is intended to create a

strict liability standard outside of the existing framework of the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA), then any conflicting state laws will most likely be preempted and will not apply to the process outlined in S. 1100. The U.S. government is only subject to state laws concerning liability under the FTCA because of the statute's framework. Under the FTCA, "[t]he United States [is] liable . . . in the same manner and to the same extent as a private individual under like circumstances ...." 28 U.S.C. § 2674. Federal courts have jurisdiction over such claims, but apply the law of the State "where the act or omission occurred." 28 U.S.C. § 1346(b). However, if S. 1100 creates a statutory framework similar to the FTCA, State laws may impose limitations on liability. You have asked the Forest Service to identify those State laws, namely, State laws that limit liability for an escaped prescribed burn. The agency does not maintain a list of these laws. You have also asked whether Federal liability is affected by any Federal law other than the FTCA. The FTCA is a limited waiver of the Federal Government's sovereign immunity that allows for tort actions arising out of the negligent acts and omissions of Federal employees and is the only basis for suits brought against the United States for negligence.

3. Having additional time to review the legislation, please provide the Committee with Administration views of S.1744, the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Land Adjustment Act of 2015?

   Answer: The Department strongly supports S.1744. The Bill provides authority for the discretionary sale of any of 30 scattered parcels outside consolidated areas of the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest. These parcels are isolated, inaccessible and/or encumbered with private uses. They have lost their "national forest" character and no longer warrant federal ownership. S.1744 would facilitate more effective and efficient management.. Conveyance of parcels such as these also allow the Forest Service to focus its limited resources on lands with higher resource values and more available for use by the public.

   The bill allows the receipts to be used for the purchase of lands within Georgia, from willing sellers, suitable for National Forest purposes. It authorizes conveyance of lands with marginal public values in exchange for lands with some of the highest recreational opportunities and which may also allow public access to larger expanses of National Forest.

   The Forest Service worked in close partnership with local governments, conservation and sportsmen organizations, such as The Conservation Fund, Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, and the Georgia Wildlife Federation to identify the tracts proposed for sale. The Forest Service has received numerous letters of support from the affected counties supporting the sale.

4. As drafted, in S. 1733, which agency within USDA would administer a program such as the Forest Incentives Program? There was a concerted effort within the 2014 Farm Bill to consolidate programs with similar purposes and objectives, and eliminate unused and unfunded programs. In what existing program(s) currently administered by the Forest Service or NRCS should this program authority be incorporated? Would active management of forest land be incentivized in the Forest Incentives Program? How could active forest management of private land be better incorporated, improved, or incentivized in this legislation?

Answer: The Forest Service currently manages three programs designed for private woodland owners:

The Forest Stewardship Program provides technical assistance to private forest landowners across the country through our State partners. This is the only Forest Service program focused on private forest land management and the primary, most extensive private forest owner assistance program in the U.S. The program plays a fundamental role in maintaining jobs and diverse forest products markets in rural communities, preparing forest landowners for new markets such as ecosystem services and other incentive programs, and keeping forests as forests.

The Forest Legacy Program (FLP) is the primary Federal program focused on preventing the parcelization of ownership and the conversion of private forests to other land uses. The FLP works with State agencies to identify and protect important forestland from conversion to non-forest use through full fee acquisition and acquisition of conservation easements.

The Community Forest and Open Space Conservation Program (CFP) provides grants to eligible local governments, Tribal governments and qualified non-profit organizations to secure community benefits through the creation and expansion of community forests. Grants are used to acquire forestland to secure public access, protect vital water supplies and wildlife habitat, provide recreational opportunities, provide demonstration sites for private forest landowners, and generate economic and other benefits from sustainable management

Each of these programs is engaged in exploring how new market demands (e.g., carbon) can influence and provide incentives for changing conservation practices and behaviors among private landowners. The Forest Service is interested in working with the Committee and our sister agencies in exploring potential legislation, such as S. 1733, to figure out how legislative proposals could best complement and enhance our existing programs and objectives.

5. In May of last year, the Secretary designated 45 million acres in 35 states for expedited forest management and restoration under the authority provided in the farm bill for insect infestation. These treatment areas would be eligible for expedited NEPA analysis, including the potential use of a 3,000 acre Categorical Exclusion. What is the anticipated timeline for these projects to get underway? To how many of the acres will the Categorical Exclusion apply?

Answer: To date, the Forest Service received letters from 36 States requesting designations under the insect and disease provisions found in section 8205 of the Farm Bill. In response to the States' requests, the Chief designated approximately 46.7 million acres of National Forest System lands. Currently, 17 projects have been proposed under the Farm Bill Insect and Disease provisions. The Forest Service intends to use the new Categorical Exclusion for 14 of the projects and streamlined Environmental Assessments for the remaining 3. The initial 14 projects will help the agency and its partners better understand and implement the new Categorical Exclusion authority while additional projects are proposed, planned, and authorized. The Forest Service expects that planning

and implementation of projects within designated areas will expand in Fiscal Year 2015 and beyond.

We anticipate that the pace of projects utilizing the Farm Bill authority will increase in the next year as the planning needed to implement these types of projects is completed. The first year after new authority is issued is generally a period of laying the ground work and once the preliminary analysis is complete the pace of implementation is expected to increase.

6. Since enactment of the 2014 Farm Bill, how many new Good Neighbor Agreements have been entered into between states and the U.S. Forest Service? Please provide a complete list of states.

Answer: The agency completed the requirements under the Paperwork Reduction Act to approve the new GNA agreement templates that will be used to carry out projects with the States. The Forest Service worked closely with the States to collaboratively develop the new templates. The templates were approved by the Office of Management and Budget on June 24, 2015. The Forest Service can utilize the agreement templates to enter into agreements nationwide and in Puerto Rico. We anticipate projects will begin using the authority this summer.

On July 17, the Forest Service Intermountain Region and the State of Utah Division of Wildlife Resources also signed a Good Neighbor Agreement that includes treatments for insect and disease infected trees, hazardous fuels reduction and any other activities to restore or improve forest, rangeland, and watershed health, including fish, and wildlife habitat. In Fiscal Year 2015, the agreement implements 12 cooperative restoration projects totaling about $1.1 million in investments.

On August 6, the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources signed a Good Neighbor Authority agreement. The first project under the agreement will have the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources prepare, award and administer timber sales that already have all of the inventory and planning work completed on the National Forest. These timber sales will enable the Forest Service to increase the amount of timber offered for sale from this National Forest to more than 100 million board feet in FY 2016. Without the Good Neighbor Authority agreement the Forest would offer for sale 85 million board feet.

7. How many acres are currently under active forest management through the Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI)? How much timber volume has been removed to date? Please provide a breakdown by National Forest for each of the above.

Answer: Please see below for a breakdown of total acres currently under active forest management on the 4FRI landscape, including both the 4FRI Phase One contract and other contracts in the project area. The table also includes expected acres expected to be under contract in Fiscal Year 2015. Timber volume sold from FY 2010 to date is provided in hundred cubic feet (ccf) and approximate million board feet (mmbf).

National Forest	Acres currently under contract			Acres expected to be under contract in FY15			Volume sold FY10 through FY15 (ccf)	Volume sold FY10 through FY15 (mmbf)
	4FRI Phase 1 contract	Other contracts	**Total for all contracts**	4FRI Phase 1 contract	Other contracts	**Total for all contracts**		
Apache Sitgreaves	2,804	15,397	**18,201**	1,300	7,436	**8,736**	**500,869**	**250**
Coconino	16,274	5,079	**21,353**	23,202	900	**24,102**	**399,095**	**200**
Kaibab	10,837	1,599	**12,436**	-	1,600	**1,600**	**101,721**	**51**
Tonto	1,537	1,179	**2,716**	-	884	**884**	**34,125**	**17**
4FRI TOTAL	31,452	23,254	**54,706**	24,502	10,820	**35,322**	**1,035,810**	**518**

8. For each of the past three fiscal years, how much in taxpayer dollars has the U.S. Forest Service spent completing NEPA preparation, analysis and drafting for the control of noxious weeds? How much of this total is devoted to lawsuits resulting from NEPA?

   Answer: The agency does not track direct NEPA preparation analysis and drafting costs. NEPA is integrated into planning and decisions regarding noxious weeds and involves analysis and compliance with multiple laws and regulations.

   - What is the average time period for completing any NEPA preparation, analysis and drafting for control of noxious weeds?

     Answer: The average lapsed time period for planning and making decisions for controlling noxious weeds over the past 3 years was approximately a range of 25-55 months when an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was prepared, 20-24 months when an Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared, and 4-5 months when the project was categorically excluded. It is important to recognize that EISs and EAs often cover large areas for longer periods of time using an adaptive management approach.

   - How does the U.S. Forest Service prioritize land on which to conduct noxious weed control activities?

     Answer: The National Forest System uses a National Strategic Framework and directives to prioritize land on which to implement noxious weed control activities. Prioritizing might be influenced by management objectives for the landscape as well as by conditions in the surrounding area. Invasive species management integrates best available science and policy, as well as risk analyses and other information to articulate decision options and predict outcomes. Invasive species management objectives also consider input from partners and cooperators (such as State Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plans, State Wildlife Action Plans, Cooperative Weed Management Area plans, and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area plans).

     Forest Service State and Private Forestry funds State invasive plant management programs to treat invasive plants that threaten our nation's forests. States coordinate with Forest Service regional invasive plant managers to communicate programmatic needs. States may prioritize their invasive plants activities based on state forest action plans, local noxious weed plans, the collaborative nature of local partnerships, and local priority projects.

   - On how many acres has the U.S. Forest Service conducted weed control activities?

     Answer:
     - For the National Forest System:
       - Fiscal Year 2012: 271,468 acres

        - Fiscal Year 2013: 252,269 acres
        - Fiscal Year 2014: 277,696 acres
    - Under our State & Private Forestry authorities:
        - Fiscal Year 2012: 44,756 acres
        - Fiscal Year 2013: 19,536 acres*
        - Fiscal Year 2014: 47,975 acres

    *For FY 2013, State Foresters chose to put more focus on public outreach and awareness. In addition, there were some impacts to this program due to the need to transfer funds for fire suppression. As a result, fewer acres were treated to control invasive plants.

Notably, the Vegetation & Watershed Management program of the National Forest System, which is the primary program for invasive weed implementation, has been reduced 24% since 2001 due to the impact of the fire budget on non-fire programs.

- Is there a way to conduct NEPA preparation, analysis and drafting across multiple agencies (i.e. one NEPA applying to USFS, BLM, US Fish & Wildlife, National Park Service)? Why or why not?

  Answer: Yes, one of the efficiencies that the Council on Environmental Quality NEPA regulations encourages is the development of one environmental analysis document with cooperating agencies when multiple Federal, State, and local agencies are involved.

- List the activities that the U.S. Forest Service has conducted to promote a more efficient categorical exclusion approval process as it relates to the control of noxious weeds.

  Answer: In 2001 the Forest Service issued guidance in five papers collectively titled: "Invasive Plant Management Decisions and Environmental Analysis." These papers described five efficiencies to approaching environmental analysis for invasive species, including a limited use of existing categorical exclusions, and making adaptive management decisions that allow for future actions without additional NEPA analysis. The Forest Service is using adaptive management decisions to increase NEPA efficiencies for controlling noxious weeds because such decisions can be most efficient when made over a large geographic area.

Senator John Hoeven

1) As you know, the Pautre Fire was an event that happened at or near the Dakota Prairie National Grasslands, South Dakota, which occurred early April 2013. Prescribed fires are acknowledged as a needed tool for the United States Forest Service (USFS) to combat wildfires. Unfortunately, things do not always go according to plan and incidents do occur due to fires jumping containment, like the Pautre Fire. Did the USFS follow their action plan for out of control fires in the case of the Pautre Fire? If so, is there a portion of that plan that the USFS acknowledges could be, or should be, altered to prevent a future disaster?

Answer: The Forest Service followed its burn plan for the Pautre (Pasture) Prescribed Fire, as required by agency policy, and met the requirements in the *Interagency Prescribed Fire Planning and Implementation Procedure Guide*, July 2008. Components of the burn plan for grassland models are: relative humidity, wind direction and speed, and the amount and condition of the grass. The burn plan had a range of acceptable conditions and parameters to meet the burn's objectives. Fire behavior in the plan used a standard program called Behave Plus, which shows how the prescribed burn could be successfully accomplished. The burn plan's weather parameters were between 32 and 80 degrees, relative humidity between 20 and 60 percent and 20 foot winds from 5 to 20 mph. Actual site and weather conditions were within prescriptions as per the burn plan.

The burn plan contained a contingency plan for fire escaping established control lines. The FS followed the contingency plan, taking immediate suppression actions and requesting assistance from five rural fire departments in the area listed as contingency resources. The FS also requested assistance from additional fire departments, and State and federal suppression resources in SD and ND.

The Forest Service uses a Facilitated Learning Analysis (FLA) process to: examine the circumstances leading up to a burn and an escape; review why decisions at the time made sense; and conclude what actions might be taken to prevent future escapes. For the Pautre Fire the review team included fire leadership and fire behavior specialists from the Forest Service and the State of South Dakota. The review noted "While no one condition contributed to the escape fire, the combination of several conditions played a role in the outcome of the prescribed burn." The Dakota Prairie Grasslands agrees with the chronology of events, the lessons learned, and the observations of the FLA Review Team and is committed to improving in the future. The Dakota Prairie Grasslands has instituted the following changes in response to this analysis:

- contacting each of the area National Weather Service stations and ensuring that all of them agree on weather predictions before initiating a burn;
- not burning within 12 hours of a predicted frontal system;
- revising burn plans to improve contingency planning in the event of an escape, looking at a second level of potential control efforts in the event of a sudden and unexpected weather change; and
- modifying firefighting equipment to be more effective on a fast moving grassland fire.

The National Fire Danger Rating System has also been adopted for state-wide use in ND to improve forecasting of fire danger conditions.

The Pautre Fire FLA has been circulated to burn bosses within the Forest Service and among its other federal, state, and local partners to share the experience so that all prescribed fire practitioners can learn from this event. Please see the link below for the report.

(*http://www.wildfirelessons.net/orphans/viewincident?DocumentKey=62eb04b5-74ff-42ce-97be-c843fb239e46*)

Senator John Thune

Mr. Bonnie, I appreciate your assessment of S.1100 and again reiterate that I strongly support prescribed burns as a management tool.

1) Do you think there could be improvements made to Forest Service prescribed burn policy?

Answer: The Forest Service regularly adapts our policies as we learn more about how best to plan and apply prescribed fire and will continue to do so. In April 2014, the Forest Service and its interagency partners including the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service, and Bureau of Indian Affairs issued revised guidance for prescribed fire planning and implementation. (*http://www.nwcg.gov/sites/default/files/products/pms484.pdf*) This revised guide incorporates a number of changes, some of which were the result of lessons learned from previous escaped fires. Forest Service Manual Chapter 5140-Hazardous Fuels and Prescribed Fire was also updated in September 2014 and incorporates a number of changes such as mandatory spot-weather forecasts and minimum review standards for prescribed fire plans. These policy changes are relatively recent, thus it is probably premature to say whether there are additional improvements that could be made immediately. We expect that it will take at least a few more years of monitoring program performance to determine if the changes are having their desired effect of improving the consistency and reliability of our prescribed fire program across the service. We will continue to adapt our policy on prescribed fire to incorporate future lessons learned.

2) I would appreciate your providing me with information about the number of claims filed over the past 10 years resulting from prescribed burns that damaged private property and the number of claims actually paid. Could you provide me with that information in the near future?

Answer: In the past ten years there have been 122 escaped prescribed burn claims totaling 84.6 million dollars and 3.8 million dollars has been paid out to claimants. Another 71.8 million dollars in claims (on seven escaped prescribed burn incidents) are still open cases that are either in litigation or may go to litigation in the future. These claims are filed under the Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA), and negligence on the part of

the Forest Service is required for payment.

3) Would you support providing the Secretary with discretionary authority to pay upon receipt of credible claims indemnity payments under $25,000, or other appropriate cap, rather than forcing claimants to wait two years or more?

Answer: The agency has an interest in resolving the damages from escaped fires more quickly and would be interested in exploring with you and the committee a variety of options.

4) Under Secretary Bonnie, you provide in your testimony that an accelerated claims process could benefit individuals who have suffered damages resulting from an escaped prescribed fire when these unfortunate events occur. Do you have suggestions for how an accelerated claims process could be implemented?

Answer: Designing an accelerated claims process would require coordination across Departments and among the various bureaus to create a comprehensive process that can be applied by all effected federal agencies. The agency would be interested in exploring options with you and the Committee.

