

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

April 23, 2015

The Honorable Tom Tidwell
U.S. Forest Service Chief
USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Tidwell:

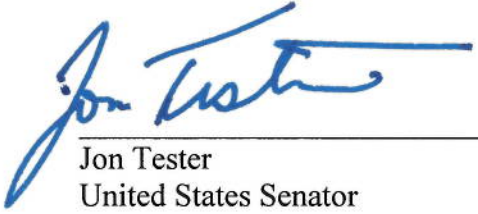
We are writing to request an update on management activities to improve the health and resilience of National Forests in Montana. We are particularly interested in how provisions to expedite management activities under the Forestry title of the 2014 Farm Bill are being implemented and understanding what, if any, barriers remain in place to fully utilizing these tools. The health of the approximately 17 million acres of National Forest system lands in Montana is inextricably tied to our state's heritage and well-being, from supporting the outdoor recreation economy, to providing jobs in the sawmills, to protecting our drinking water supplies.

We were pleased that you acted quickly last year to recognize and designate seven large landscape areas in Montana as insect and disease treatment areas based on the recommendation of Governor Bullock. We are encouraged that the Lolo National Forest was the first to sign a record of decision for a project under this new authority. However, we need to see more. With that in mind, we would like answers to the following questions regarding the streamlined authority given to the Agency in these designated areas: How many projects are in the pipeline in Montana? How are these projects being integrated in to the Forest Service's existing planning process? Additionally, we ask that you provide us with a list of these potential projects along with the acreage, type of project, location and timeline for work to begin.


We appreciate the fiscal constraints the Forest Service faces in carrying out these and other duties. To address these challenges, we are united and committed to fixing the way we budget for wildland fire suppression. The current way of funding these efforts is a major obstacle to responsible forest management, and it should not continue. Accordingly, we strongly support funding suppression costs for the largest, catastrophic wildfires under a separate budget authority in the same way that we treat other large-scale natural disasters. Enacting legislation to make this change will free up much-needed resources for other management activities.

Your Agency's prompt and effective use of these Farm Bill tools is vital to improving forest health and creating jobs in our state. We stand ready to assist you in swift implementation of the Farm Bill forestry tools, and we look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Jon Tester
United States Senator



Steve Daines
United States Senator



Ryan Zinke
United States Congressman