

January 14, 2015

Senator Steve Daines
1 Russell Senate Courtyard
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Daines:

We, the undersigned Montanans, write today to thank you for your interest in the future of Montana's national forests. Collectively, we share many decades of experience working together to ensure a better future for our forests and the communities that depend upon them. We are grateful for this opportunity to share our experience and recommendations with you.

As you know, Montanans of all stripes have come together over the past decade to find collaborative solutions to Montana's public land-management problems. Unfortunately, many of our efforts have struggled to move through Congress and some of our efforts languish for lack of timely and consistent action by the Forest Service. All too often, Congress and the Forest Service have been unable to fully implement these collaborative initiatives. At the same time, small but vocal minorities at both ends of the political spectrum refuse to participate and work to block proposals supported by the broad mainstream of Montana.

We believe that management of Montana's national forests needs reform and that place-based proposals have an important role to play. A century of aggressive fire suppression, past land management practices, excessive litigation and declining Forest Service capacity have left millions of acres in poor condition and at increased risk of severe, uncharacteristic wildfires. At the same time many deserving wild areas of our national forests—vital to Montana's outdoor heritage and economy—await permanent protection. The current situation is not producing the healthy, sustainable federal forests that Montana needs, nor is it adequately supporting many rural economies.

Through our on-the-ground collaborative work, we have shown that balanced solutions to these problems are possible. Reasonable forest reform that generates more timber for mills, reduces wildfire risks to communities, helps protect and restore water quality and wildlife habitat, includes very clear forest management objectives, and designates significant new wilderness and other conservation lands can produce needed, bipartisan solutions that are flexible enough to address multiple and sometimes unique local issues.

We can understand and sympathize with the interest in national, system-wide reforms, but we realize that there may be additional factors at play in other states with large nearby urban centers, different climates and forest ecology, and alternate management histories. Please ensure that addressing Montana's needs is not delayed by conflict or delays in other states and regions of the country. Please put Montana first.

We respectfully request that as you move forward that you please:

- Develop any and all legislation in a public, transparent, and highly collaborative process that is more substantive than a 30-day call for public comment. We agree that time is of the essence but recognize that these problems have taken decades to develop and will require more than 30 days to resolve.
- Advance legislation with the strong, unified, bipartisan and concurrent support of the entire Montana Congressional delegation. As we observed in the closing days of the 113th Congress, bills that have the full support of our delegation are much more likely to be enacted.
- Honor, advance and build upon the work of the many existing national forest collaborative groups in Montana and empower them to succeed.

- Ensure the legislation you advance takes a large-landscape approach that creates jobs and benefits fish and wildlife habitat through active management, scientifically sound forest restoration and permanent land protection measures, including new wilderness designation. This will allow for diverse parties to see that their interests are being addressed and not deferred or sacrificed to one entity with a loud voice.
- Work with coalitions of the willing. Deference to organizations and individuals who oppose collaborative approaches to forest management and reform merely maintains a status quo that does not serve the interests of most Montanans.
- Address practical, broadly supported opportunities to: 1) Solve the ongoing fire-funding problem and the resulting drain on Forest Service budgets; 2) Reduce delays associated with litigation and other forms of conflict; 3) Increase Forest Service and partner capacity; 4) Include language (more sophisticated than simple acreage targets) to ensure Forest Service accountability and implementation; 5) Increase the pace and scale of active management and forest restoration; 6) Prioritize and expedite mechanical treatment in the front country while protecting backcountry roadless areas and restoring high-quality wildlife habitat and watersheds; 7) Recognize that collaboration is a multi-interest stakeholder process that brings “the willing” to the table to work on and make recommendations to the Forest Service regarding restoration needs. 8) Create incentives for collaboration in places where it does not yet exist or has not fully matured while avoiding poison pills that would generate unnecessary opposition. 9) Recognize the need for the Forest Service to continue developing and implementing management and restoration activities outside of areas covered by collaborative processes.
- Before you fully develop, lend your support to or work to advance any new timber or land-management-reform proposals, we request the opportunity to review, discuss and meet with you together to share our assessment of how such proposals would impact Montana.

Montana’s collaborative efforts need funding, agency buy-in and unified, bipartisan support from our entire delegation to help ensure their success. We respectfully request that you work with the full Montana delegation to support and advance place-based community-developed approaches to problems facing our national forests. In doing so, you can help play a leadership role in resolving vexing resource management issues in a way that brings people together and finds common ground that works for the people and lands of Montana.

We stand eager to work with the entire Montana Congressional delegation and all other interested and willing parties in a good-faith collaborative effort to this end.

Signed,

Julia Altemus, Executive Vice President
Montana Wood Products Association

Scott Brennan, Montana State Director
The Wilderness Society

Brian Sybert, Executive Director
Montana Wilderness Association

Gordy Sanders, Resource Manager
Pyramid Mountain Lumber

Charles W. Roady, Vice President & General Manager
F.H. Stoltze Land & Lumber Co

Caroline Byrd, Executive Director
Greater Yellowstone Coalition

Dave Chadwick, Executive Director
Montana Wildlife Federation

Craig Rawlings, President and CEO
Forest Business Network

Loren Rose, Controller
Pyramid Mountain Lumber

Bruce Farling, Montana State Director
Trout Unlimited

Brent Anderson, Owner
Conifer Logging

Jim Stone, Chairman
Blackfoot Challenge

Dale Bosworth, Chief (Retired)
United States Forest Service

Tim Love, District Ranger (Retired)
United States Forest Service

Joel Webster, Center for Western Lands Director
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Bob Brown, Former Secretary of State and
State Senate President, Whitefish

Robyn King, Executive Director
Yaak Valley Forest Council

Jon Haufler, Executive Director
Ecosystem Management Research Institute

Mack and Connie Long, Owners
Bob Marshall Wilderness Outfitters

Addrien Marx, Business Owner
Seeley Lake

Reed Gregerson, President
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Wendy Weaver, Principal
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Mitchell Doherty, Planner
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Montana Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Mary Tuckerman-Hollow, Government Relations Dir.
The Nature Conservancy, Montana

cc: Senator Jon Tester
Congressman Ryan Zinke
Governor Steve Bullock