

August 31, 2018

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

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

The Honorable Mike Conaway
Chairman, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Collin Peterson
Ranking Member, House Committee on Agriculture
1301 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairmen Roberts and Conaway and Ranking Members Stabenow and Peterson,

On behalf of the millions of conservationists, hunters, anglers, and natural resource professionals represented by the undersigned organizations, we wish to thank you for your hard work to complete a 2018 Farm Bill. We know your staff have been meeting daily throughout August and that you expect to complete a bill by the September 30 deadline.

As you continue to work on a Farm Bill conference report, we request that you consider including certain key reforms to increase and enhance active forest management on our federal lands. While important steps have been taken in recent legislation, forest management faces additional challenges that can be addressed if a few additional targeted tools are made available.

The below reforms, identified through our organizations' consultation with the USFS and BLM, will address both immediate and longer-term challenges to forest management on federal lands. The results will be improved wildlife habitat for many at-risk species, increased ability of the agencies to meet their management plan goals for early successional habitat, and increased collaboration with partners so the federal government can achieve more work at less cost to taxpayers. Importantly, these forest management tools will also decrease the occurrence and intensity of wildfire, improve water quality, and increase forest resiliency.

Several of the recommendations that we strongly support have already been included in either the House or Senate version of the Farm Bill or both. At a minimum, we hope that these priorities can be included in a final bill:

- Extending the Healthy Forest Restoration Act authorities to include hazardous fuels as a priority project category and making the authority eligible for expedited environmental analysis. Additionally, extending the categorical exclusions for priority projects to projects located in areas classified as Fire Regime IV.
- Reauthorizing the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program.
- Establishing statutory categorical exclusions for:
 - Sage grouse and mule deer habitat
 - Creation or enhancement of early successional forest for wildlife habitat improvement
 - Infrastructure for forest management activities

While not included in either the House or Senate versions of the Farm Bill, we request that you consider inclusion of two additional policies that we've consistently supported and that Congress has debated:

- Fully addressing the *Cottonwood* decision by applying the same narrow reforms that were included in the omnibus appropriations bill for the listing of species and the designation of critical habitat to the "new information" trigger under the Endangered Species Act.
- Facilitating the continued and expanded use of Good Neighbor Authority by codifying existing practices concerning the flow of contributions and receipts associated with these projects.

There are certainly additional reforms which we support, but the above are the most critical. We urge you to include these common sense management measures to improve the resiliency of our nation's federal forests. Our organizations stand ready to assist you as you work toward a bill that has bipartisan support and will be signed by the President.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Bear Trust International
Boone and Crockett Club
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Council to Advance Hunting and Shooting Sports
Delta Waterfowl
Mule Deer Foundation
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative
National Rifle Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Orion: The Hunter's Institute
Pope and Young Club
Quality Deer Management Association
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi

CC: House and Senate Farm Bill Conferees