

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 29, 2013

The Honorable Debbie Stabenow  
Chairwoman  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Frank Lucas  
Chairman  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1301 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Agriculture  
328A Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Collin Peterson  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Agriculture  
1305 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Conferees:

As you begin formal negotiations on the *Federal Agriculture and Risk Management Act of 2013* (H.R. 2642) and the *Agriculture Reform, Food, and Jobs Act of 2013* (S.954), we would like to commend you for your commitment to developing a new farm authorization bill. We respect the significant challenges you face in the upcoming negotiations and understand the difficult choices you must make in order to complete this important task.

As members of the Congressional Western Caucus, we have a particular interest in the programs, authorizations, and reforms within the Forestry Title of the bill. Many of us live in districts that are in close proximity to federal forests and have suffered the devastating consequences inflicted by wildfires and the bark beetle epidemic.

Congress must fundamentally reform failed management policies that have deteriorated the health and resiliency of our forests. The current federal forest management system does not promote sound management or healthy forests, but instead is reactive in nature and routinely responds to catastrophic wildfires and insect infestations that sound management could prevent. Although the need to suppress fires is never going away, federal policy must shift towards proactive forest management policies. Without these reforms, the status quo will imperil even more of our public safety personnel, bankrupt our federal and local governments, destroy the natural treasures many of us hold dear, and cause our rural way of life to go extinct.

Accordingly, we write to express our strong support for the following important forest health policies included in either the House-passed and/or Senate-passed bill and encourage you to maintain these provisions as you resolve the differences between the House and Senate versions:

**1) Permanent reauthorization and reform of the End-Result Stewardship Contracting Authority**

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) use stewardship contracts to combine timber harvesting with service work in a manner that

achieves a variety of land-management goals. This authority has proven successful in, among other things, reducing fire hazards, restoring watersheds, and promoting healthy forests in our districts. Congress must reauthorize this authority, which is set to expire at the end of the current Continuing Resolution (P.L.113-46).

Additionally, it is imperative that important reforms like the House-passed stewardship contract disparity language are included. This language establishes parity among the fire-liability provisions in stewardship contracts. If enacted, timber companies will be more likely to participate in the stewardship program, making this tool more effective in protecting our communities and fostering healthy forests.

## **2) Good Neighbor Authority**

Since 2000, the State of Colorado has operated under authority granted to it by a House Interior Appropriations rider that permits the state forestry divisions to enter into contracts with the Forest Service to execute projects on National Forest Service lands by the state forestry division or subcontractors. Colorado has used the authority, which has come to be known as Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), to carry out nearly \$1 million dollars of work on over 40 projects. Utah, which was granted similar authority in the Interior Appropriations bill in 2004, has used its authority to carry out more than 15 projects that cover thousands of acres of public land. The pilot has been a success, and the policy should be expanded to all states.

## **3) Large Airtanker and Aerial Asset Firefighting Recapitalization Pilot Program**

Recent record-level wildfire events are stressing the aging USFS airtanker fleet. Many of the core aircraft operated by the Forest Service are more than 60-years old. This pilot program would allow the Chief of the Forest Service to establish a large airtanker and aerial asset lease program that could alleviate some of these burdens and improve the federal government's wildfire suppression capabilities in a cost-effective manner.

## **4) National Forest Critical Area Response**

The National Forest Critical Area Response subtitle in the House-passed bill will provide much-needed authority and flexibility for the Forest Service to effectively begin addressing the pine beetle epidemic that is devastating our national forests and threatening our communities. This subtitle applies bipartisan Healthy Forest Restoration Act procedures to critical areas within the National Forest System based on scientific Disease Risk maps. It allows a 10,000 acre categorical exclusion for high risk areas to reduce costly and lengthy delays in implementing commonsense forest management practices to treat infested areas. Without proactive management, the dead and dying trees left by the pine beetle epidemic add additional fuel to catastrophic fires that have spread across the West. We must act to prevent substantial risk to public health and safety and lessen the impact to the habitat for wildlife found on forest lands.

While these policies will not cure our nation's forest health crisis, they will go a long way towards providing some relief. Many of these initiatives have been included in some of our members' stand-alone legislative proposals, have been subject to intensive review before the

relevant committees of jurisdiction, and have garnered overwhelming bipartisan support. The final farm authorization legislation presents an opportunity to see these policies finally enacted into law.

Therefore, we request your support in conference to retain these important provisions in the final version of the bill and help us save taxpayer dollars, promote forest jobs, improve public safety, and restore forest health. Our forest communities depend on it.

Together as members of the Western Caucus, we appreciate the opportunity to comment on such an important matter, and thank you for your leadership on the Farm Bill. Please do not hesitate to contact our offices with questions, or if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,



Steve Pearce  
Co-Chairman  
Congressional Western Caucus



Cynthia M. Lummis  
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Chairman Emeritus  
Congressional Western Caucus



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Cory Gardner  
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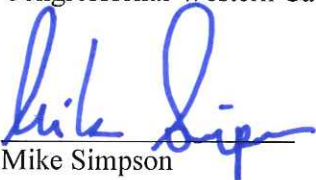
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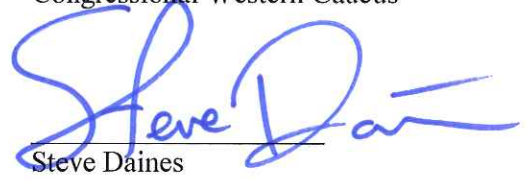
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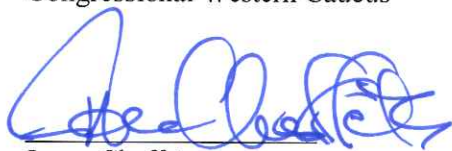
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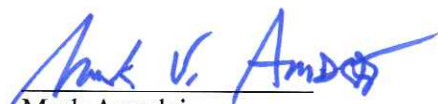
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cc: The Honorable Patrick Leahy, The Honorable Tom Harkin, The Honorable Max Baucus The Honorable Sherrod Brown, The Honorable Amy Klobuchar, The Honorable Michael Bennet, The Honorable Pat Roberts, The Honorable Saxby Chambliss, The Honorable John Boozman, The Honorable John Hoeven, The Honorable Steve King, The Honorable Mike McIntyre, The Honorable Ed Royce, The Honorable Eliot Engle, The Honorable Dave Camp, The Honorable Sandy Levin, The Honorable Randy Neugebauer, The Honorable Jim Costa, The Honorable Mike Rogers (AL), The Honorable Tim Walz, The Honorable K. Michael Conaway, The Honorable Kurt Schrader, The Honorable Glen "GT" Thompson, The Honorable Jim McGovern, The Honorable Austin Scott, The Honorable Suzan DelBene, The Honorable Rick Crawford, The Honorable Gloria Negrete McLeod, The Honorable Martha Roby, The Honorable Filemon Vela, The Honorable Jeff Denham, The Honorable Marcia Fudge, The Honorable Rodney Davis, The Honorable Sam Johnson, The Honorable Steve Southerland, The Honorable Tom Marion