Skamania County
Board of Commissioners

Skamania County Courthouse
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Christopher Brong
District 1

Doug McKenzie
District 2

Bob Hamlin
District 3

June 9, 2015

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

At a May 5 hearing of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, you spoke about the need to reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfire in Washington State and throughout the nation. As you consider potential solutions, we urge you to support measures that increase opportunities for active management of our federal forests to restore the health and resiliency of our forests and communities.

The federal government controls 43 percent of Washington State's total forest land. The Forest Service is the largest land manager with over 8 million acres, or 37 percent of Washington's forest land. Over the last two decades, federal regulations and lawsuits have caused a rapid decline in federal forest management activities. In fact, today 97 percent of Washington state timber harvests come from non-federal land, while only 3 percent comes from federal forest lands.

As a result our federal forests have become unnaturally dense, overstocked and more vulnerable to catastrophic events. We have also experiencing reductions in forest diversity and resiliency on federal forestlands across Washington State. Current federal forest policies not only threaten the timber industry, it also threatens the state's outdoors industry, hunting opportunities, and other sectors that depend on healthy, vibrant forests and rivers.

Meanwhile, local governments across our state continue to grapple with the reduction in shared revenues coming from our National Forests. While Congress' recent two-year reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination (SRS) Act provides partial, short-term relief, it is clear the program is not a long-term sustainable solution for our forested communities where unemployment rates are typically 2-3 times King County's unemployment rate. Congress must take swift action on solutions that improve the health of our federal forests, provide shared revenues for our counties, and create more jobs in our communities through responsible increases in federal timber harvests.

As you said in the recent Senate hearing, "We need new solutions." We wholeheartedly agree.

The primary factor limiting the active management of federal forests is the cost and time required for the Forest Service to satisfy the analysis paralysis that drives federal forest management. Past and current litigation, administrative appeals, and conflicting federal regulations have all played a role in shaping the broken system we have today.

Examples of key reforms include:
-Preventing outside groups from using the courts to obstruct projects, particularly for projects that have been developed and achieved through local collaboration.

-Streamlining the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to reduce the time and cost of Forest Service project planning.

-Providing clear direction for sustainable timber harvests and revenue generation in areas that have been identified as suitable in forest plans to benefit local communities.

-Ensuring that 25 percent of the revenue from all Forest Service timber sales, including stewardship contracting sales, are shared with local counties.

- Creating additional incentives and revenue sources for the Forest Service to implement more timber management projects, whether through stewardship contracting, third-party NEPA contracting, or other new authorities.

-Ending the practice of fire borrowing that forces the Forest Service to raid management accounts in order to suppress the larger and more severe fires we are experiencing.

-Ensuring Endangered Species Act consultations are transparent and completed in a timely manner.

Active forest management is one of the few effective, long-term solutions for improving the health of our forests and rural communities. As you work with other members of Congress to address these issues, please consider and support these reforms.

Sincerely,

absent
Christopher Brong
Commissioner

Doug McKenzie
Chair

Bob Hamlin
Commissioner

I, Bob Hamlin, move to direct Debbie Slack, Financial Management Coordinator to submit a principal only payment on the loan with Umpqua Bank in the amount of $500,000. This payment will be made from Federal Forest Fund Revenues.

Seconded by: Doug McKenzie

Motion approved on: 6/16/15

ATTEST:

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS SKAMANIA COUNTY WASHINGTON CLERK OF THE BOARD

Chair

Commissioner

Clerk of the Board

absent
Commissioner

Aye 2
Nay 0
Abstain 0
Absent 1

APPROVED AS TO FORM

Skamania County Prosecutor