Skamania County
Board of Commissioners

Skamania County Courthouse
240 NW Vancouver Ave
P.O. Box 790
Stevenson, WA 98648

(509) 427-3700 FAX (509) 427-3708
TDD Relay Service (800) 833-6388

Christopher Brong
District 1

Doug McKenzie
District 2

Bob Hamlin
District 3

July 7, 2015

Senator Patty Murray

Senator Maria Cantwell

Representative Susan DelBene

Representative Rick Larsen

Representative Dave Reichert

Representative Denny Heck

Representative Jaime Herrera-Beutler

Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers

Representative Derek Kilmer

Representative Jim McDermott

Representative Adam Smith

Representative Dan Newhouse

Dear Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, Representative DelBene, Representative Larsen, Representative Reichert, Representative Heck, Representative Newhouse, Representative Herrera Beutler, Representative McMorris Rodgers, Representative Kilmer, Representative McDermott, and Representative Smith:

We are writing to urge you to support HR 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015, which was recently approved by both the House Natural Resources Committee and the Agriculture Committee. This legislation builds on the 2014 Farm Bill by providing federal land managers new tools to restore the resiliency of our federal forests through active management and collaboration.

Our nation's federal forests are facing serious threats from fires, insects, and disease due to a lack of active forest management. The poor health of our federal forests also threatens wildlife populations, neighboring non-federal lands, as well as the vitality of rural, forested communities across the country. The bill will help expedite needed forest management treatments to improve the health and vitality of our federal forests.

HR 2647's use of the Categorical Exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act will allow routine, collaborative projects with known effects to be more quickly prepared, analyzed, and implemented. The Forest Service has long

experience with management techniques to reduce forest pests and disease, thin hazardous fuels, create and maintain habitat for species, recover damaged timber, and protect water quality. These projects mitigate risks and also help create early successional forest habitat which is good for wildlife.

These projects are routine, reoccurring activities with known effects, and therefore should qualify for exclusions from repeated, extensive analysis.

The average time required for the Forest Service to complete a forest management project using a CE is 6 months, versus 37 months for an Environmental Impact Statement and 19 months for an Environmental Assessment. In addition to saving time, the expanded use of the CE will allow the agencies to direct their limited resources at planning additional projects. The acreage size limits in the bill, prohibitions on their use in sensitive areas, and requirement for collaboration should address any concerns about the potential for overuse of these new authorities. The bill rightly encourages more aggressive efforts to recover damaged timber after large fires and other catastrophic events.

We strongly support the new authorities providing additional sources of revenue to plan and implement forest management and restoration projects. The bill provides mechanisms for retained receipts from timber sale and Stewardship contracts to be used to fund the environmental analysis and project layout activities needed to implement additional projects. With at least 65 million acres of federal forests at risk to insects, disease, and wildfire, these new authorities are critical to increase the pace and scale of forest management treatments. We also support ensuring that timber revenues generated through Stewardship contracts be subject to receipt sharing with local counties.

We also endorse HR 2647's provisions requiring those who wish to litigate these broadly supported projects to post a bond to cover the government's cost of defending the project. This will discourage litigation from outside parties that's all too often intended to delay needed management activities. This type of frivolous litigation, often based on procedural claims, is one of the root causes of the current analysis paralysis crippling the agencies and sets back the efforts of local collaborative group to reach consensus around local projects.

While the Resilient Federal Forests Act won't solve all the problems facing our federal forests, it will provide the agencies powerful new tools to begin improving forest health and resiliency. We urge the passage of HR 2647 in order to enact a workable, implementable set of forest reforms this Congress.

Sincerely,

Doug McKenzie Chair	Bob Hamlin Commissioner	Chris Brong Commissioner