United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 4, 2013

Senator Ron Wyden
Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Lisa Murkowski
Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Murkowski:

We applaud your leadership in examining the need to reform the way the Forest Service copes with increasing wildfire management challenges and the need to reform the management of the National Forest System. We commend you for tackling these nationally important issues on a bipartisan basis.

As the testimony in the June 4th and June 25th hearings in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee demonstrated, the status quo on our federal forests is unacceptable. The Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management face a dire situation due to the growth of wildfire suppression spending which has disrupted the already strained budget for forest management. This not only affects the operations of our National Forests, but also causes severe economic consequences for the surrounding rural communities. We appreciate the Committee's renewed focus on addressing the root cause of these economic and social hardships through reform of the National Forest System intended to increase the pace and scale of forest management, including timber harvest.

We also appreciate the one year of bridge funding for the Secure Rural Schools program that was included in the recently passed Helium Stewardship Act of 2013 (Public Law No: 113-40). Until forest reform legislation can be enacted, we must have short-term bridge funding to prevent further economic dislocation in counties with significant federal forest.

We look forward to legislation to restore the health of all of Federal our forests and strengthening our rural communities. Recognizing that we are in a new budget environment with the agencies having to do more with less, please let us know how we can work with you to improve the management of our federal forests.

Sincerely,

Mark Pryor
Senator Pryor

Thad Cochran
Senator Cochran

Mike Crapo
Senator Crapo

John Boozman
Senator Boozman

Senator Baucus

Senator Chambliss

Senator Baldwin

Senator Enzi

Senator Johnson

Senator Begich

Senator Hatch

Senator Kaine

Senator Lee

Senator Thune

Senator Wicker

Senator Tester

Senator Risch