

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

November 2, 2012

Tom Tidwell
Chief, US Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Mr. Tidwell,

As you are well aware, fire season is just concluding, and the Pacific Northwest certainly was not exempted from experiencing devastation. In our own state of Washington, catastrophic wildfires burned more than 500,000 acres. Given the extent of the damage that is taking place across the nation, it is past time to begin the discussion toward bringing about science based, balanced, and sustainable management of our national forests.

Our Eastern Washington forests in particular, including the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and the eastern portion of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (GPNF), suffer from extremely poor health. In the GPNF alone, the rate of insect and disease caused mortality is nearly half. The devastating impact of diseased timber was a major contributor to the swift spread of the Table Mountain and Cascade Creek fires that recently ravaged nearly 63,000 acres, including an estimated \$8.3 million in private property. In addition to the biological damage that continues to take place, these two fires, along with a dozen other major fires on federal forestlands in Washington, have already ravaged our taxpayers at a cost of at least \$89 million for the fire-fighting efforts, and some of those fires continue to burn today.

Last year, the Washington Department of Natural Resources projected that nearly 3 million acres of Washington's forests would likely be destroyed due to disease and lack of management. Taking a drive through those forests provides a sobering and haunting view of entire national forests that are dead or dying from insect infestation. It is difficult for us to believe that the conditions of these forests are acceptable by anyone's standards.

As a result of the Forest Service's hands-off policy, harvesting about two percent of Washington's 9 million acres of forests, we have created unnatural and unhistorical conditions within our forests that have not only failed to protect the Northern Spotted Owl (NSO), but have put other wildlife and our communities at peril. These fires are not the seasonal, regenerative fires that occur in healthy forests; since the listing of the NSO we have seen an explosive fuel

load build up in Washington's forests, and unless we bring about rational forest management we stand to suffer even more needless destruction by uncontrollable wildfire.

Failing to heed the warnings of federal and state scientists risks the demise of entire ecosystems, and will only amplify the damage of an unsuccessful and regrettable policy of managing for a single species. Our clean water, our salmon, our wildlife, and our communities hang in the balance.

Mr. Tidwell, your agency has been tasked through federal law to oversee, manage and care for our national forests. Currently, that is not happening – but we believe that living up to those duties is both possible and necessary—and it is critical for the agency to start taking proactive steps to restore health to our forests now. We believe a departure from single-species management in favor of more science-based, sustainable forestry practices, including increased regenerative and thinning harvests, would take us there.

As a start, we request a detailed response as to the Forest Service's plans this year to implement specific management actions in Washington's 3 million acres of national forests to create jobs, protect species and prevent increased risk of catastrophic wildfires that are destroying Northwest communities, lives and private property.

Sincerely,



Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress



Doc Hastings
Member of Congress