



The voice of fish and wildlife agencies

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October 25, 2017

The Honorable John Barrasso
Chairman
Committee on Environment & Public Works
307 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Environment & Public Works
513 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Barrasso and Ranking Member Carper:

I write as Executive Director of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (Association) to share our support for the major concepts of the Discussion Draft of the “Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017”. We stand ready to work with you as the bill matures through the Committee on some of the details that would best assist our state fish and wildlife agencies across the country to meet their fish and wildlife objectives on federal forest lands.

Founded in 1902, the Association represents the collective perspectives of the state fish and wildlife agencies; all 50 states are members. The Association’s mission, as it was in 1902, is to protect the authorities of the state fish and wildlife agencies to manage fish and wildlife within their borders, including on federal lands and waters. We strive to work collegially with the federal agencies to meet their Congressional-directed land management objectives, and the state fish and wildlife objectives in the respective state, for the benefit of our citizens and future generations. We are still working with our states to identify wherein resides the common ground with which all will be comfortable, thus our reticence to explicitly support the bill in all of its current details.

I know that a legislative fix to the wildfire funding issue is not in your Committee’s jurisdiction, but we urge you to work with the other Committees of jurisdiction to enact a permanent fix this year. “Fire-borrowing” affects every state with a National Forest, not just the western states, because other budget line items such as fire prevention, wildlife conservation, and recreation are used to pay for fire suppression which now constitutes over 52% of the US Forest Service budget. We have no preference for the details of the budget mechanism which will implement the budget fix for fire-borrowing; we support any budget approach that can get 60 votes in the Senate and be signed by the President.

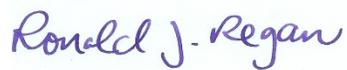
We understand, appreciate, and support the intent of many approaches proffered in the bill to facilitate active management of our federal forests to meet future desired conditions for wildlife habitat. We are working with our states to try to settle on an acreage cap for the Categorical Exclusions, realizing the need to have a cap in the bill; find an acceptable expedited NEPA

review process for forest projects developed by “collaboratives” to facilitate on the ground active forest management; and other provisions in the bill..

As we work with our state fish and wildlife agencies on details such as acreage caps, and types of prescriptive management techniques for sagebrush steppe habitat we would like to work with you on some of the bill language as it matures in Committee. We appreciate that the Discussion Draft is on a fast-track, so we will be time sensitive in sharing our recommendations with you.

Thank you very much for your leadership on the critically important issue and for consideration of the Association’s perspectives.

Sincerely,



Ronald J. Regan
Executive Director
Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies