

October 24, 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:

As Congress continues to consider a response to the wildfires that defined the summer of 2017 for much of the American West, the undersigned sportsmen's conservation organizations—who collectively represent many American hunters, anglers and outdoor enthusiasts—write today in support of the draft Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017 (WPMA).

The most recent loss of life and property in California shows that we are not talking only about "forest health" here but also about human lives. A confluence of factors is driving record-setting wildfire seasons, including hotter and drier conditions, longer duration fire seasons, lack of consistent active management of our national forests, litigation and inadequate funding levels for the US Forest Service's forest health and restoration accounts. Catastrophic wildfire is the most high profile symptom of the issue of forest health, but millions more acres of our nation's forests are at severe risk from fires, insects and disease. It would be worse to do nothing for five or ten years than it would be to try almost anything during the same period of time.

Since the 2014 Farm Bill, various proposals for further improving forest management and finally fixing the wildfire funding framework have come up just short of enactment in Congress. We believe it is time to agree on as many as possible to accelerate the urgent work needed in the National Forests.

Federal land management agencies need new authority to accelerate the pace of restoration projects by improving the efficiency of environmental review processes, such as action/no action alternatives for collaborative projects, a minor fix to the highly-regarded Good Neighbor Authority, and improvements to restoration-based categorical exclusions modeled after the bipartisan provisions of the 2014 Farm Bill.

The fire crisis has refocused forest policy on to the restoration of wildlife habitat benefits and other ecological conditions. We urge the committee to find agreement on such details as acreage-limits on projects (which we believe is secondary to the imperative of completing more restoration projects of any size).

Additionally, our organizations support meaningful litigation reforms that ensure that the time, money, and effort expended in the courts is focused on substantial issues and supported by substantial evidence. Toward this end, we support the pilot authority to evaluate the effectiveness of litigation alternatives such as arbitration. We also support focusing Endangered

Species Act consultation requirements at the project-level rather than having to redevelop entire forest plans.

Our organizations also strongly support Title II of the WMPA on Sage Grouse and Mule Deer Habitat Conservation and Restoration. This title will allow conservation partners to move quickly on landscape habitat restoration projects that are proving to have a tremendous impact for mule deer, sage grouse and other species dependent on sagebrush rangelands.

We urge Congress to come together in the next weeks to adopt these sensible and well-vetted provisions that will enhance the health of our national forests.

Sincerely,

American Woodcock Society
Archery Trade Association
Boone and Crockett Club
Campfire Club of America
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
Conservation Force
Delta Waterfowl
Houston Safari Club
Mule Deer Foundation
National Shooting Sports Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
North American Grouse Partnership
Pheasants Forever
Quail Forever
Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
Ruffed Grouse Society
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Whitetails Unlimited
Wild Sheep Foundation
Wildfire Forever
Wildlife Management Institute
Wildlife Mississippi