

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 30, 2017

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

We write to you today requesting that the House Appropriations Committee (the Committee) take steps in the FY18 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill to address the ongoing decline in health of our National Forest System (NFS). In FY17, the Committee included language to allow the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to use funds to categorically exclude up to 3,000 acres for management activities for purposes such as addressing disease infestation, reducing hazardous fuels, and the protection of water supplies and critical habitat. We therefore request similar language be included in the FY18 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

As you are aware, the NFS has been in a continuous state of declining health for more than two decades. In 2016, more than five million acres of public land burned across the country. Not only are more wildfires burning federal lands, but they burn hotter, faster, and destroy more acres. These fires are a tremendous threat to watersheds, wildlife, and communities across the country.

In response to these catastrophic fires, the USFS is increasingly forced to shift dollars from management activities and other accounts, and use the funds to fight fires on federal lands. The USFS is then left with fewer resources to conduct thinning, timber harvests, and controlled burns, which can reduce the severity of wildfires. This near-annual fire-borrowing cycle negatively impacts fiscal and forest health.

In 2015, the House worked in a bipartisan manner to pass HR 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act. This legislation would have ended fire-borrowing in a fiscally responsible way, and also made necessary changes to forest management practices by building on the 2014 Farm Bill's categorical exclusions, expediting the removal of dead trees after a wildfire, and timber harvesting in areas impacted by pine beetle infestation. Better management of our forests will help to reduce the severity of wildfires, improve environmental quality, and save taxpayers money in the long run.

While the new Congress begins to address forest management issues through legislative action, we ask that you include USFS categorical exclusion authority language similar to that from the FY17 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress



Kurt Schrader
Member of Congress



Steve Pearce
Member of Congress



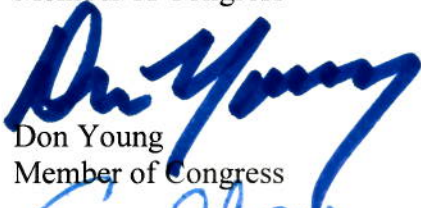
Jason Smith
Member of Congress



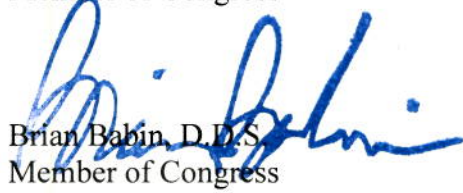
Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Member of Congress



Scott Tipton
Member of Congress



Don Young
Member of Congress



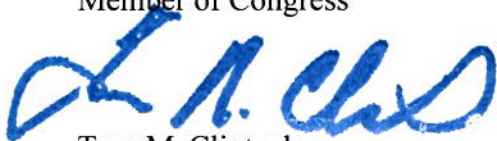
Brian Babin, D.D.S.
Member of Congress




Jason Chaffetz
Member of Congress



Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress



Tom McClintock
Member of Congress



Jim Costa
Member of Congress



Glenn Thompson
Member of Congress



Elijah E. Cummings
Member of Congress