

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 31, 2023

The Honorable Randy Moore
Chief
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Moore,

We write regarding the Timber Sale Program report for Fiscal Year 2022 and with questions about the target planning for Fiscal Year 2023. We believe that a strong Timber Sale Program has the dual benefit of ensuring our National Forests meet the multiple-use mandate embodied by the National Forest Management Act and other laws and by creating jobs in rural communities while protecting our public lands by thinning overgrown tree stands to improve wider environmental forest health, decreasing the risk of catastrophic wildfire, and providing responsibly harvested wood products.

According to the FY22 report, the Forest Service sold over 2.9 billion board feet of timber. While this is an increase of three percent over the amount sold in FY21, it is 11 percent lower than FY19 – the last pre-pandemic year of timber harvests. This is concerning because in the past three years alone, five sawmills have closed near National Forest System (NFS) lands, and with reductions in harvest outputs continuing in some regions, additional sawmills and forestry contractors are at risk of closure over the next 6 to 18 months.

While there was a major increase in timber outputs in Region 5, largely due to salvage sales following two disastrous fire seasons (2020 and 2021), we are concerned to see the other major timber producing regions (Regions 2, 6, and 8) experience a combined drop of 176 million board feet with timber outputs in Region 6 falling more than 33 percent since 2019. This is the lowest level of timber sales in Region 6 in nearly two decades.

We have heard from the Forest Service that one of the challenges to the Timber Sale Program is dealing with “low value material.” Unfortunately, permanently losing sawmills creates even more “low value material,” as the distance to transport the logs to remaining sawmills becomes cost prohibitive. Our federal forests are overstocked with trees, which increases wildfire risk and stress on the trees – making them more susceptible to insects and disease – so it is imperative the Forest Service work alongside Congress to actively manage our forests, remove overgrowth, and ensure sawmills and other forest sector infrastructure remain open.

The Forest Service has indicated that it needs to increase current treatment levels by two to four times to get ahead of a growing forest health and wildfire crisis. Congress has provided the Forest Service with an influx of new funding and created statutory authorities to help address the backlog of forest management work that has contributed to the declining health of our forests and the subsequent catastrophic wildfires. We remain focused on the need to expedite work to address the wildfire crisis across the West.

To that end, please provide answers to the following questions by February 20, 2023:

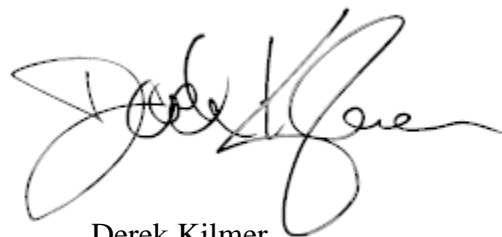
1. Current Forest Service timber outputs are less than half of the harvest levels permitted in current forest plans based on the Allowable Sales Quantities and Probable Timber Sale Quantities. What is the strategy to increase the amount of timber harvested?
2. Region 8 and 9 (which make up all the NFS lands east of the Mississippi River), account for over 40 percent of the timber outputs, even though these two regions only have about 25 percent of all NFS lands. How does the Forest Service plan to increase timber harvest in all Regions, especially those in danger of catastrophic wildfire?
3. Timber sale targets are essential for sawmills and forest contractors to plan their business operations and investments. How will the Forest Service ensure that each Region and Forest is assigned timber sale targets and meets these targets?
4. Of the recently created statutory authorities in both the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, how has the Forest Service ensured every level from Regional Foresters to District Rangers are aware of and using these new authorities to increase active forest management and harvest activities? How effective have these new authorities been at getting necessary management work done and which new authorities have been used in which Regions?
5. What is the main obstacle limiting the Forest Service's ability to increase its timber outputs? Are there additional statutory authorities that Congress can create to address this obstacle?
6. How has the Forest Service proactively engaged with sawmills and forest contractors near National Forest System lands to ensure that timber sales are economically viable?
7. How much standing sawtimber exists on acres of National Forest System lands that are designated as Insect and Disease Treatment Areas, as well as on the "priority firesheds" designated by the Forest Service in the first year of the 10-year wildfire strategy?

We look forward to hearing how the Forest Service will prioritize increasing active forest management for a healthier forest ecosystem and a corresponding increase in sustainable timber outputs.

Sincerely,



Dan Newhouse
Member of Congress



Derek Kilmer
Member of Congress



Glenn "GT" Thompson
Member of Congress



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress

Tom McClintock
Member of Congress

James Moylan
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