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Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 30, 2019

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Chairwoman
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment
and Related Agencies
2007 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Joyce
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Interior, Environment,
and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth HOB
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman McCollum and Ranking Member Joyce:

As your subcommittee prepares the Fiscal Year 2020 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Appropriations bill, we request that you prioritize funding and include robust resources to address the bark beetle epidemic.

Bark beetles have caused significant damage on roughly 100,000 square miles of forest in the western United States alone. These tiny insects have resulted in negative social and economic impacts for affected communities while causing tree mortality and catastrophic wildfires to skyrocket in the process. More than 600 different bark beetle species exist throughout the country and challenges vary state-by-state. The damage done by these pests has caused significant environmental damage and left a massive footprint of dead, red trees often referred to as ‘eyesores’ in the process.

In Colorado, the spruce beetle epidemic continued last year, spreading across 178,000 new acres. In fact, spruce beetles have killed millions of trees on more than 1.8 million acres in Colorado since 2000. In Utah, more than 2.2 million acres have been vulnerable to bark beetle infestations. The Forest Service reports that the mountain pine beetle has killed trees on more than six million acres across western and central Montana during the last 16 years on record. Over the last couple years, tree mortality increased significantly from bark beetles in the state of Oregon. Bark beetles have caused millions of dollars of damage to the timber industry in Alabama and Mississippi. Bark Beetles have spread up the Atlantic coast, reaching New York and Connecticut.

According to the Forest Service, “Between 2010 and 2016, 102 million trees died on Federal, State, Tribal, and private lands in California due to a severe multi-year drought coupled with dense forest conditions, high numbers of bark beetles, and a period of increasingly warm temperatures. An additional 27 million trees, mostly conifers, died throughout California since November 2016, bringing the total number of trees that have died due to drought and bark beetles to an historic 129 million on 8.9 million acres.” The Forest Service claims they can only remove a fraction of these dead trees. In Washington, recorded pine bark beetle activity nearly doubled in 2016 as pine bark beetles killed roughly 1.74 million pine trees in 2016. Mountain pine beetle damage also increased significantly in Washington in 2016.

As a result of previous progress combating these species, Congress has in recent years become complacent in addressing bark beetle challenges and severely reduced funding for relevant initiatives. For example, the [2011 Western Bark Beetle Strategy](#) indicates that the Forest Service received \$101.5 million in FY 2010 for total bark beetle activities. In fiscal years 2010 and 2011, the Forest Service provided \$12.7 million and \$13.1 million to combat the Western bark beetle activities. However, in fiscal year 2016 that number shrunk to \$4.7 million and the fiscal year 2020 request only totaled \$3,540,000. Bark beetle infestation has a direct correlation to destruction by fires as millions of dead trees killed by these species have fueled catastrophic wildfires.

2017 was one of the worst wildfire seasons in history with 66,131 fires burning more than 9.7 million acres. It is of the utmost urgency that the federal government adopt a forward-thinking, active management strategy that combats dangerous wildfires before they get started. Thinning overgrown forests and removing hazardous fuels creates jobs and increases overall forest health. Unfortunately, over the last several decades the Forest Service has focused scarce resources on suppression.

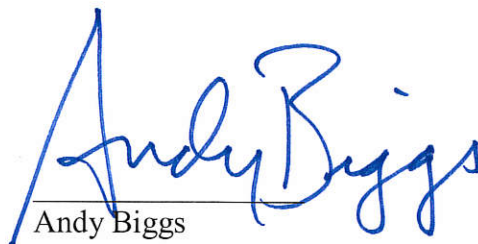
Bark beetle epidemics and catastrophic wildfires are a significant threat throughout the country and associated tree mortality and other devastation is on the rise. Accordingly, we ask that you prioritize funding and provide robust resources for combatting the bark beetle epidemic in FY 2020.

We thank you for your consideration of this request, and for your leadership on the committee.

Sincerely,



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



Andy Biggs
Member of Congress



Rob Bishop
Member of Congress




Duncan Hunter
Member of Congress


Doug LaMalfa
Member of Congress


Doug Lamborn
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Tom McClintock
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Scott R. Tipton
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Bruce Westerman
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