

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
STATE OF MONTANA

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March 28, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for taking the time to discuss forest management and the need for coordination between federal, state, and local entities when I visited Washington, D.C., in February. I'm pleased we share a commitment to active forest management to improve forest health and protect our communities from wildfire. To strengthen our partnership and chart a clear path to achieve our shared goals, I invite you to Montana to see the work we have done and the work we are planning.

Montana is facing unprecedented wildland fire risk and forest health conditions that threaten our homes, communities, and economy. We have identified 3.8 million acres that represent our highest priority for action, 60 percent of which are on federal land. Through cross-boundary coordination and initiatives funded and prioritized by both of our agencies, we're taking action to mitigate the risk of fire to Montanans. But more must be done.

As governor of Montana, active forest management is one of my top priorities. To succeed with our forest management and wildfire reduction goals, we need the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to commit to increasing the pace and scale of management with us. Not only is collaboration the Montana way, but it is the only way to accomplish our shared goals.

Regional leadership at both the U.S. Forest Service and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has committed to work with Montana to achieve the goals of our Forest Action Plan. With your personal engagement, we can solidify these partnerships and move from ideas to action.

To increase the pace and scale of forest management in Montana, we ask USDA to commit with us to:

- *Formalize the use of the Montana Forest Action Plan.* The Montana Forest Action Plan was the result of extensive federal, state, and local cooperation. Let's put it to work. Formalizing the use of Montana Forest Action Plan at the federal level will allow both federal and state agencies to focus on the cross-boundary issues with common purpose. By doing so, we can ensure that we achieve our shared goals of improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk.
- *Commit to directing more funds and resources towards private land work.* As we implement more cross-boundary work across Montana, it is imperative we bolster our efforts to engage private lands, which can be accomplished by directing more resources to USDA State and Private Forestry and the NRCS.
- *Continue to support and expand Good Neighbor Authority (GNA).* Programs that allow us to add capacity to our federal partners are essential as we look to utilize all available tools and authorities to combat the forest health and wildfire risk crisis, especially on federal land in Montana. USDA's commitment to the Montana's GNA program is critical to allow for the investment of additional resources to expand this effective program. We also seek to use the GNA in innovative ways, including for post-wildfire salvage, which is currently an underutilized opportunity in our state.
- *Complete the Lincoln County Shared Stewardship agreement and follow suit on other local projects.* Every community in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) has unique challenges and Lincoln County is no exception. The Lincoln County Shared Stewardship agreement is a great example of how the federal government can leverage the expertise of local communities to address the unique challenges presented at the most local levels. This agreement has the potential to improve the lives and livelihoods of residents of Northwest Montana, while at the same time mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire. We need USDA staff to commit time and resources to engaging with local projects and partners to help achieve our mutual goals and objectives in the Montana communities that rely on the federal forests.

By working on these priorities together, we will make our forests more resilient and healthier for generations of Montanans to come. Thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to welcome you to Montana soon.

Sincerely,



Greg Gianforte
Governor

cc: Leanne Marten, Regional Forester, Region 1, U.S. Forest Service

Tom Watson, State Conservationist, National Resources Conservation Service
Dr. Homer Wilkes, Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment, U.S.
Department of Agriculture
Robert Bonnie, Undersecretary for Farm Production and Conservation, U.S. Department
of Agriculture
Randy Moore, Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Terry Cosby, Chief, National Resources Conservation Service
Amanda Kaster, Director, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation
Sonya Germann, Administrator, Forestry Division, Department of Natural Resources and
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