

July 2, 2015

Dear Member of Congress:

Our organizations are writing to urge you to vote “yes” on H.R. 2647, the Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015, which was recently approved by both the House Natural Resources Committee and the Agriculture Committee. This legislation builds on the 2014 Farm Bill by providing federal land managers new tools to restore the resiliency of our federal forests through active management and collaboration.

Our nation’s federal forests are facing serious threats from fires, insects and disease due to a lack of active forest management. The poor health of our federal forests also threatens wildlife populations and neighboring non-federal lands, as well as the vitality of rural, forested communities across the country. The bill will help expedite needed forest management treatments to improve the health and vitality of our federal forests.

H.R. 2647’s use of the Categorical Exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act will allow routine, collaborative projects with known effects to be more quickly prepared, analyzed, and implemented. The Forest Service has long experience with management techniques to reduce forest pests and disease, thin hazardous fuels, create and maintain habitat for species, recover damaged timber and protect water quality. These projects mitigate risks and also help create early successional forest habitat which is good for wildlife. These projects are routine, reoccurring activities with known effects, and therefore should qualify for exclusions from repeated, extensive analysis.

The average time required for the Forest Service to complete a forest management project using a CE is six months, versus 37 months for an Environmental Impact Statement and 19 months for an Environmental Assessment. In addition to saving time, the expanded use of the CE will allow the agencies to direct their limited resources at planning additional projects. The acreage size limits in the bill, prohibitions on their use in sensitive areas and requirement for collaboration should address any concerns about the potential for overuse of these new authorities. The bill rightly encourages more aggressive efforts to recover damaged timber after large fires and other catastrophic events.

Our organizations strongly support the new authorities providing additional sources of revenue to plan and implement forest management and restoration projects. The bill provides mechanisms for retained receipts from timber sale and stewardship contracts to be used to fund the environmental analysis and project layout activities needed to implement additional projects. With at least 65 million acres of federal forests at risk to insects, disease and wildfire, these new authorities are critical to increase the pace and scale of forest management

treatments. We also support ensuring that timber revenues generated through stewardship contracts be subject to receipt sharing with local counties.

We also endorse H.R. 2647's provisions requiring those who wish to litigate these broadly supported projects to post a bond to cover the government's cost of defending the project. This will discourage litigation from outside parties that's all too often intended to delay needed management activities. This type of frivolous litigation, often based on procedural claims, is one of the root causes of the current analysis paralysis crippling the agencies and sets back the efforts of local, collaborative groups to reach consensus around local projects.

While the Resilient Federal Forests Act won't solve all the problems facing our federal forests, it will provide the agencies powerful new tools to begin improving forest health and resiliency.

We urge the House to pass H.R. 2647, and to work expeditiously to meet with the Senate and enact a workable, implementable set of forest reforms during this Congress.

Sincerely,

Alabama Forestry Association
Allegheny Hardwood Utilization Group
American Farm Bureau Federation
American Forest & Paper Association
American Forest Resource Council
American Hardwood Export Council
American Loggers Council
Appalachian Hardwood Manufacturers, Inc.
Associated California Loggers
Associated Logging Contractors - Idaho
Associated Oregon Loggers
Association of Consulting Foresters
Black Hills Forest Resource Association
California Forestry Association
Colorado Timber Industry Association
Douglas Timber Operators
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
Forest Landowners Association
Forest Resources Association
Georgia Forestry Association
Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association
Hardwood Federation
Hardwood Manufacturers Association
Hardwood Plywood & Veneer Association
Hawaii Forest Industry Association
Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association
Intermountain Forest Association

Kentucky Forest Industries Association
Lake State Lumber Association
Louisiana Forestry Association
Maple Flooring Manufacturers Association
Michigan Forest Products Council
Mississippi Forestry Association
Missouri Forest Products Association
Montana Logging Association
Montana Wood Products Association
National Alliance of Forest Owners
National Hardwood Lumber
National Lumber and Building Material Dealers Association
National Wood Flooring Association
National Wooden Pallet & Container Association
Northeastern Loggers' Association
Ohio Forestry Association
Oregon Forest Industries Council
Oregon Women in Timber
Penn-York Lumbermen's Club
Pennsylvania Forest Products Association
Railway Tie Association
Southeastern Lumber Manufacturers Association
Southern Oregon Timber Industries Association
Sustainable Forest Action Coalition
Texas Forestry Association
Treated Wood Council
Virginia Forest Products Association
Virginia Forestry Association
Washington Contract Loggers Association
Washington Forest Protection Association
Western Wood Preservers Institute
Wood Component Manufacturers Association