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December 7, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

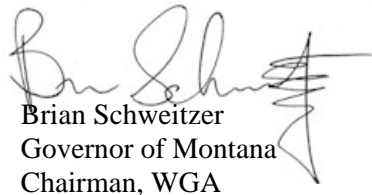
On behalf of Western governors we write to convey our support for the restoration of our National Forests as articulated in your August speech in Seattle. We urge you to begin this restoration effort by focusing on funding and implementing a sustainable road strategy as recommended in the Western Governors' Association (WGA) Policy Resolution 08-3: "Restoring and Maintaining a Sustainable Road System on National Forest Lands," adopted in July 2008 (attached). We believe that a sustainable road system, both economically and environmentally, will provide access to forests while complementing federal and state clean water and species protection efforts.

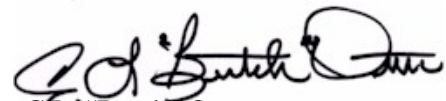
As you know, National Forest lands provide clean water vital for irrigation, domestic water supply, recreation, instream flows for fish and wildlife and other important ecosystem benefits. Unfortunately, because of the decline in revenue for road maintenance, the resulting legacy road system is unsustainable and is becoming a risk to property, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, as well as inhibiting access for recreation and in-holdings.

In recent years some progress has been made through funding provided via the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation program and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Western governors recognize that restoration and maintenance of our National Forests can be a source of long-term, sustainable jobs in rural communities as evidenced in a recent study that indicated for every \$1 million spent on forest watershed restoration 14.5 jobs can be generated. Clearly a sustainable road initiative is not only ecologically beneficial but economically beneficial. We believe this is a multi-year effort that should begin right away.

Again, we applaud your vision for a restored National Forest landscape. We stand ready to work with you and respectfully urge you to move forward with a sustainable road initiative.

Sincerely,


Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
Chairman, WGA


C.L. "Butch" Otter
Governor of Idaho
Vice Chairman, WGA

Attachment -- WGA Policy Resolution 08-3

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