



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
Chairman

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

Pam O. Inmann
Executive Director

Headquarters:
1600 Broadway
Suite 1700
Denver, CO 80202

303-623-9378
Fax 303-534-7309

Washington, D.C. Office:
400 N. Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 388
Washington, D.C. 20001

202-624-5402
Fax 202-624-7707

www.westgov.org

December 11, 2009

The Honorable Walt Minnick
Bipartisan Congressional Healthy Forest Caucus
1517 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kurt Schrader
Bipartisan Congressional Healthy Forest Caucus
1419 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Minnick and Schrader:

Thank you for your presentation to the Western Governors' Association Forest Health Advisory Committee meeting on October 22nd in Boise, Idaho. We applaud your bipartisan effort to reach agreement on policies and programs that will help sustain and enhance forest conditions, ecological systems, and the economic and social fabric of our rural communities. Western governors share these goals. We believe it is critical to retain and develop our forest industry infrastructure and thereby improve the capacity of local communities to meet our mutual objectives and grow their economies. In addition, it cannot be overstated how closely coupled forest management and environmental health are to a locally integrated forest products industry. People working toward sustainable solutions must address the relationship among environmental protection, social values and economic viability at the local level, as well as at the broader landscape scale.

Over the past decade, 64 million acres have been affected by wildfire, many of which have been uncharacteristically large and severe. In addition, 22 million acres are at risk of insect and disease outbreaks resulting in widespread tree mortality. Meanwhile, more than 400 mills in 19 Western states have closed since 1986, due in part to the lack of a reliable and affordable timber supply. This is a 31 percent loss in milling capacity and labor income, with one-third of the decline occurring over the past five years. Without help from Congress, forest products jobs – like our forests – will be wiped out throughout the West.

The continued loss of professional logging contractors and timber-processing facilities is a major concern. Without a locally integrated forest products industry, state, tribal and federal resource managers are at a disadvantage. They will be unable to respond in a timely and cost-effective manner in; 1) treating insect and disease outbreaks, 2) protecting communities at risk of wildfire, 3) utilizing woody biomass to produce renewable bioenergy, 4) mitigating the effects of climate change, and 5) promoting biodiversity and resilience of fire-adapted ecosystems.

The Western forest products industry is impacted not only by forest-based factors such as timber supply, but also broader market-driven factors. Complex issues facing the forest products industry include: the lack of a consistent harvest level to retain an integrated and sustainable infrastructure; a federal timber program that cannot meet program goals and outputs due to budgetary and process constraints; and variable national and global market conditions.

The Honorable Walt Minnick
The Honorable Kurt Schrader
December 11, 2009
Page 2

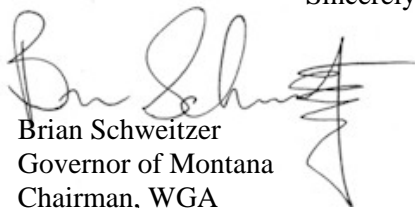
To support this vital industry, we urge you to develop a ***“National Forest Products Recovery and Stabilization Program”*** that offers immediate solutions to this urgent situation. Immediate action is needed to:

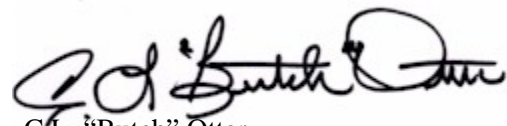
1. Direct appropriated program dollars from the America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) and U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) toward extending existing timber contracts, including stewardship contracts and agreements, for which the NEPA analysis is completed. This would enable contractors to not only work as markets improve, but also seek opportunities within the analysis area for additional service work and timber harvest activities.
2. Shift ARRA funds from U.S. Forest Service and BLM capital improvement projects and utilize any returned funds to hazardous fuels reduction projects using mechanical treatments in areas where a NEPA analysis has been completed. This would result in a mix of sawlog volume and biomass utilization opportunities, while protecting communities at risk from wildfire.
3. Fund a revolving loan program as emergency capital for the forest products industry through the U.S. Department of Commerce or the USDA Rural Communities Assistance Act.
4. Direct the Small Business Administration and the USDA Rural Development Agency to develop a bonding program for timber, stewardship contracts and stewardship agreements.
5. Direct the Forest Service to allocate congressionally designated, non-wildland urban interface, hazardous fuel reduction dollars for mechanical treatments on Condition Class II and III lands that are suitable for timber harvest and production.

Ecosystem services, such as water quality and quantity, forest products, recreation opportunities, and wildlife corridors are being adversely affected by wildfires, insects and diseases. Implementing these five action items would provide the assistance that is urgently needed to restore and stabilize our forest industry and improve the health of our forested landscapes.

We thank you in advance for your assistance and look forward to working with the Bipartisan Congressional Healthy Forest Caucus and your staff to solve these immediate challenges that impact our rural communities. In the near future, we would like to discuss with you ways to resolve some longer-term issues that would improve the health of forests and rangelands, provide renewable energy feed stocks, and revitalize rural communities throughout the West.

Sincerely,


Brian Schweitzer
Governor of Montana
Chairman, WGA


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