



WESTERN GOVERNORS' ASSOCIATION

Gary R. Herbert
Governor of Utah
Chairman

John Hickenlooper
Governor of Colorado
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

August 27, 2012

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W., Room 6151
Washington, DC 20240

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

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Secretary Salazar,

With more of the Western wildfire season still ahead of us, we are writing to ask you to work with Western Governors to identify additional actions needed to expedite hazardous fuels reduction and increase forest and range management in high risk areas of Western forests and rangelands.

We had hoped Congress would take action in the face of the ongoing drought, the poor health of western forests and the outbreak of several devastating wildfires this year. But they have yet to agree on bi-partisan legislation to improve the health of our forests and shared wildfire response.

We appreciate and agree with the recent renewed federal focus on aggressively attacking even small fires in remote areas to ensure they don't escape federal jurisdiction and damage private homes and lands. We would like to work with you to identify other opportunities under existing policies and authorities to improve forest and rangeland health including:

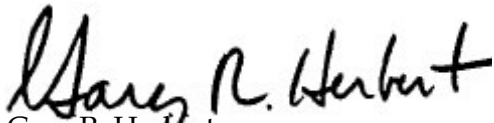
- Realigning and leveraging existing resources, and exploring use of Good Neighbor principles to identify, coordinate, and expedite hazardous fuels reduction in high risk areas, including areas where lives, homes and important habitat for fish and wildlife populations targeted for recovery are at risk;
- Expediting contracting procedures for commercial timber sales and salvage operations;
- Reviewing relationship between grazing regulations and utilization of grazing as a land management tool to reduce large high-intensity range fires;
- Improving federal-state-local coordination and decision-making for prescribed fires and fire suppression activities;

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- Increasing coordination between federal and state forestry agencies to expedite updates to land and resource management plans that build upon priority areas already collaboratively identified for fuels reduction treatment projects in state forest action plans;
- Modifying existing grant programs to support the critical wood processing infrastructure necessary for forest health restoration and management to be economically viable; and
- Exploring ways to effectively apply the Healthy Forest Restoration Act authorities to streamline evaluation, review and appeal of priority areas to reduce wildfire threats to communities, infrastructure and watersheds, and to promote long-term health of our forests, water and wildlife.

We need to stand together and identify a solid plan of action under shared leadership to protect lives and homes and improve forest health, wildfire response and recovery. We look forward to your response with suggested near term joint efforts we can pursue.

Sincerely,



Gary R. Herbert
Governor, State of Utah
Chairman, WGA



John Hickenlooper
Governor, State of Colorado
Vice Chairman, WGA