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July 8, 2004

The Honorable Greg Walden
Chairman
House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
1337 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6205

The Honorable Jay Inslee
Ranking Member
House Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
1337 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6205

Dear Congressmen Walden and Inslee:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association we would like to thank the Subcommittee for taking the initiative to hold a hearing on June 23rd on biomass utilization. We welcome the timely discussion by the Subcommittee on this issue as Western Governors believe that biomass utilization could be a contributor to restoring our forests to a healthy condition with the added benefit of helping to diversify our energy portfolio through a renewable energy source.

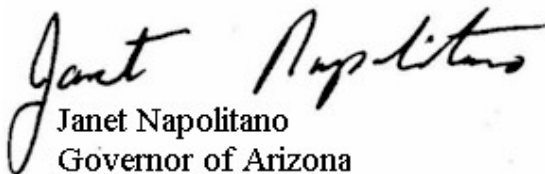
Recent wildfires throughout the West demonstrate the current unhealthy state of our forests and wildlands. Hazardous fuel loads are at all-time highs. Combined with ongoing drought and the wildland-urban interface where people and fuels meet and mix, we have a volatile situation and a strong need to implement fuels reduction projects to restore our forests to a healthy condition. Biomass utilization may be a part of the solution. The 10-year Comprehensive Wildfire Strategy and Implementation Plan, supported by the WGA, highlights the importance of hazardous fuel reduction and biomass utilization. Finding uses for materials resulting from hazardous fuels treatments could help provide economic development opportunities for rural communities while creating safer and healthier communities and watersheds. We must underscore that the management goal for our forests must be the long-term health of our forests, but we firmly believe biomass can be a constructive part of achieving that goal.

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The WGA is directly involved with the application of biomass technologies through the National Biomass State and Regional Partnership established through the Department of Energy. The WGA, along with the other regional bodies in the partnership, will work toward developing increased bio-energy awareness, increased bio-energy development, improved leveraging of investments, and state policy and incentives favorable to biomass. As one mechanism, we think this biomass partnership has great promise as the linkage between reducing forest health threats and finding clean, secure and diversified energy sources.

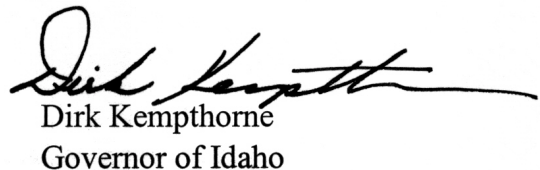
The Governors thank you for your efforts and for holding a hearing on this important topic.

Sincerely,



Janet Napolitano
Governor of Arizona

Lead Governor for Forest Health



Dirk Kempthorne
Governor of Idaho

Lead Governor for Forest Health

cc: Rep. Pombo
Rep. Rahall
Western Governors
The Hon. Joshua Bolten
The Hon. Ann Veneman
The Hon. Gale Norton
The Hon. Spencer Abraham