

September 12, 2016

The Honorable Pat Roberts
Chairman, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry
109 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Roberts:

Our organizations are writing to you today on behalf of our millions of members who are dedicated to enhancing fish and wildlife conservation on our nation's public and private forest lands and watersheds and to securing the future of our hunting and angling heritage. We support the Committee mark-up of HR 2647, the Resilient Federal Forest Act of 2015, which addresses wildfire suppression funding and federal forest management enhancements. Good proactive forest management coupled with a fire-fighting funding fix is our shared goal. We urge the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee to use the reported version of this bill to find a bipartisan path forward with the House on legislation to advance forest management enhancements and a permanent fix to wildfire suppression funding. We respectfully request your consideration of the following recommendations.

We support provisions in the bill that fix the problem of account transfers (out of important recreation, wildlife and fire prevention accounts) when wildfire suppression costs exceed the appropriated amounts for the Forest Service and BLM. We respectfully request that you consider adding a continuing ceiling set at last year's wildfire suppression 10-year average, and above which the agencies may access disaster funding, so that the Forest Service's and Department of the Interior's overall funding outlooks do not see any further shift in allocation of their budget towards wildfire suppression funding. The decline in staff resources and budget authority for other activities has contributed to the challenges of overstocked forests in all parts of the country, which is also reflected in certain types of wildlife habitat decline.

Specific to the bill, we would respectfully request the consideration of establishing a Pilot Arbitration Program as a way to resolve disputes around forest management projects and as an alternative consideration to Title III of HR 2647. Along with the Forest Service, we support the use of alternative dispute resolution such as arbitration on a pilot basis to reduce the threat of litigation and provide greater efficiencies and incentives for collaborative forest management activities. A pilot effort will allow appropriate evaluation and consideration of this alternative approach to expediting the delivery of on the ground forest conservation.

We have concerns with Section 702 "Management of Indian forest land authorized to include related National Forest system land and public land," which fails to recognize the authority of the state fish and wildlife agencies to manage fish and wildlife on Federal forest land designated as Tribal forest land. We are committed to working closely with your staff to resolve this so that the authorities of all three sovereign governments are appropriately acknowledged and respected.

Thank you for your continued leadership. We look forward to working with you and other Senate leaders on these issues to pass meaningful bipartisan legislation that gets signed into law by the President this year.

Sincerely,

Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies
Boone and Crockett Club
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
National Wild Turkey Federation
Orion-The Hunter's Institute
Quality Deer Management Association
Ruffed Grouse Society
The Wildlife Society
Tread Lightly!
Whitetails Unlimited
Wildlife Forever
Wildlife Management Institute