

United States Senate  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 5, 2015

The Honorable Thomas Tidwell  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
201 14<sup>th</sup> Street, SW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tidwell,

Catastrophic wildfire and limited water supplies are central environmental challenges facing Arizona in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Given that both are directly linked to health of forest lands in the state, we write to encourage the United States Forest Service (USFS) to implement specific remedies for improving forest health and providing a sustained wood supply to willing industry.

For more than a decade, we have been fortunate to witness a limited yet successful partnership between the Service and the timber industry in Arizona to thin thousands of acres of overgrown forest and address wildfire risk. The White Mountain Stewardship Project resulted in the restoration of large forest areas that otherwise would likely have been left untouched. This and accompanying projects have fostered investments in wood products facilities of more than \$130 million, yielding benefits in both economic activity and fire-risk mitigation. In addition, the subsequent Four Forests Restoration Initiative (4FRI) responsibly seeks to achieve cost-effective landscape-scale level treatment of Arizona's northern forests and a reduction in both the severity and expense of catastrophic wildfires. We appreciate the Service's efforts to complete work on the 4FRI Phase One Environmental Impact Statement, yielding 586,000 treatable acres, and efforts to enable access to more acreage for the wood products industry in the White Mountains of eastern Arizona.

Given fiscal realities, successfully mitigating the risk of catastrophic wildfire in Arizona will no doubt require continued cooperation between a vibrant timber industry and the Service. However, this partnership has been hindered by impediments to agency action and limitations on existing industry capacity. The pace of treatment activity in the Kaibab and Coconino National Forests is unsatisfactory and the efforts to sustain the pace of restoration in the eastern forest, while significant, remains inadequate. Even if fully implemented, the efforts related to 4FRI would only partially restore the northern forests to health. The enormity of the need necessitates decisive choices and expeditious implementation. As such, we request you promptly act to provide more access to the Coconino, Kaibab, Tonto and Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, including forest stands outside the scope of the Phase One 4FRI stewardship contract.

We believe that a substantial increase in the number of people and organizations involved in forest thinning, made possible only by timely and consistent access to treatable acres, would serve the dual purposes of the Service managing its forests while ensuring the successful mitigation of Arizona's risk of catastrophic wildfire. We encourage the Forest Service to take the steps necessary toward ensuring an accurate economic picture of the federal forest resources

in state, including the available wood supply and its marketability. Additionally, we urge the Service to consider utilizing “good neighbor” authority to engage the State and enable project planning such as environmental analysis, project preparation, and fuel reduction. Lastly, as to the Phase One 4FRI stewardship contract, we urge the Service to determine definitively within a time certain whether the incumbent prime contractor can indeed perform its contractual obligations reliably and sustainably to both ensure that required acreage is cleared and address the challenge of residual fuel and biomass following treatment activities.

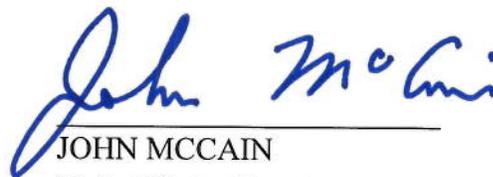
We recognize and very much appreciate your past responsiveness to our concerns and previous efforts to respond to these challenges. We thank you in advance for your continued time and attention to these issues. As always, we ask that this matter be handled in strict accordance with all applicable agency rules, regulations, and ethical guidelines.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jeff Flake", written over a horizontal line.

JEFF FLAKE

United States Senator

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John McCain", written over a horizontal line.

JOHN MCCAIN

United States Senator