

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 11, 2014

The Honorable Mary Landrieu
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Landrieu:

We write to reiterate our request that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee promptly schedule budget oversight hearings to address, among other things, the threat of catastrophic wildland fire in the West. Beginning early with fires destroying thousands of acres in California, Arizona, and Nevada, this year's wildfire season is projected to be severe. As the committee of jurisdiction, the Energy and Natural Resources Committee has an obligation to conduct oversight of the Bureau of Land Management's and U.S. Forest Service's wildland fire management activities including the funding structure for suppression and prevention.

One of the greatest challenges facing our western forests is the growing severity of the fire season. Extreme fire behavior has become the new normal, due in no small part, to the mismanagement or lack of management of our public lands. This mismanagement has resulted in the loss of property, natural resources, wildlife habitat, as well as jobs and economic opportunities in rural communities.

Equally troubling is the corresponding increase in the cost of fire suppression. By expending more to put fires out, federal land-management agencies have been forced to divert and "borrow" money from non-fire programs. Significant disruptions in proactive management work have impacted programs that directly support improving forest health and reducing suppression costs; programs such as hazardous fuel reduction and community wildfire planning.

Last month, we formally requested that the Committee schedule hearings on President Obama's FY2015 Budget request, providing an opportunity to receive testimony and ask questions of the Secretary of the Interior, the U.S. Forest Service Chief, and the Secretary of Energy. To-date, no Energy and Natural Resources Committee budget hearings have been scheduled. Given that this fire season is off to an early and destructive start, it is critical that the Committee hear from the land-management agencies and examine and evaluate the agencies' capacity to respond appropriately to wildfires, reduce fire risk to communities, and improve forest, watershed, and rangeland health.

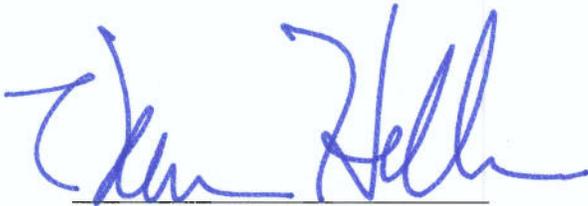
Additionally, the Committee spent significant time and resources conducting oversight and legislative hearings on forest management and wildland fire last session. Those hearings showed broad agreement that the status quo is unacceptable. The Committee should take the lead and provide much needed policy direction and reform to increase the pace and scale of land management across the West. The U.S. House of Representatives has already approved

legislation to restore active forest management. These types of reforms will benefit the economy, protect public safety, and reduce federal expenses.

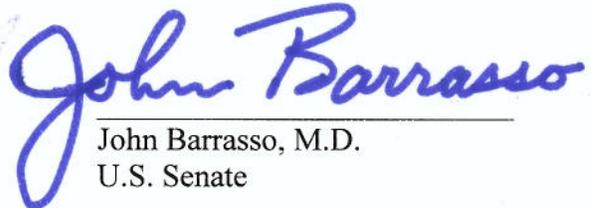
As members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, we respectfully urge you to ensure the Committee carries out its oversight responsibilities with respect to wildland fire management by scheduling budget hearings and building on our past Committee work to advance national forestry, rangeland, and watershed management reforms that will reduce wildland fire risks through more active management.

We appreciate your consideration of this important matter.

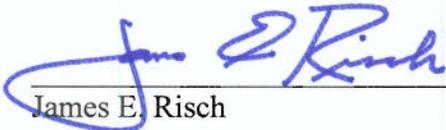
Sincerely,



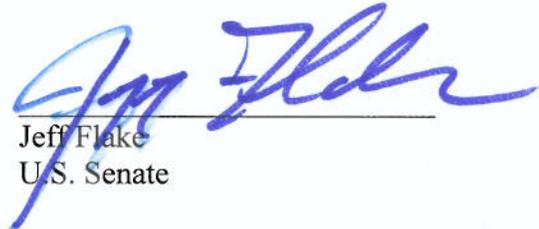
Dean Heller
U.S. Senate



John Barrasso, M.D.
U.S. Senate



James E. Risch
U.S. Senate



Jeff Flake
U.S. Senate



Mike Lee
U.S. Senate

Cc: Energy and Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski