

July 19, 2012

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
1203 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Edward Markey
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Natural Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
2108 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Markey:

The undersigned organizations, representing millions of anglers, hunters, recreational shooters, farmers, ranchers, rangeland managers, and conservationists, are pleased that the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands is holding a legislative hearing to address the enormous problem of wildfire and bark beetles on federal lands. The undersigned strongly support the goals of H.R. 5744, the *Catastrophic Wildfire Prevention Act of 2012*, and H.R. 6089, the *Healthy Forest Management Act of 2012*. Both of these bills would reduce the numerous layers of red tape that prevent local land managers from conducting much-needed thinning to improve the health of our national forests.

The recent and devastating wildfires throughout the West are a symptom of the deteriorating health of our forests. Bark beetle, drought and lack of management have left much of the West under imminent threat of catastrophic wildfire. As groups whose members have made enormous efforts to improve wildlife habitat, we are deeply concerned to see the effects that these fires have on wildlife. Additionally, there is a wide consensus that mechanical thinning and prescribed burns improve wildlife habitat. Many types of wildlife, such as elk and grouse, require active forest management to open forest canopies in order to allow for sunlight penetration to ground level, in turn, promoting vigorous growth of grasses, forbs, and shrubs that help establish the nutritionally rich forage base essential to sustaining healthy wildlife populations. The same management that helps wildlife population also helps prevent catastrophic forest fires and can help prevent the spread of bark beetles, which have decimated millions of acres of the West.

H.R. 6089 gives states the authority to identify areas afflicted by the bark beetle epidemic, drought, or at high risk of wildfire, and to put in place emergency hazardous fuels

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reduction projects to address those conditions. Additionally, this bill would allow increased local input in fuel reduction projects, and extends authority for stewardship contracting to 20 years. Finally, the bill contains a “good neighbor authority,” which allows the secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to enter into cooperative agreements with state foresters to provide forest, rangeland, and watershed protection services on applicable federal lands.

H.R. 5744 would give the federal land management agencies more tools to quickly get wildfire prevention projects approved on land that is at-risk of catastrophic wildfire. Additionally, it would allow federal land managers to specifically work to reduce fuel loads in threatened or endangered species habitat. Finally, it allows for much greater local input into the process by permitting the public to petition the Departments of Interior and Agriculture when members of the public see a critical wildfire threat in their local area. This local input could be extremely valuable in targeting limited federal dollars to the most critical areas.

These bills would provide the Departments of Interior and Agriculture valuable tools that would help expedite fuel reduction programs, and we strongly encourage the committee to work to pass them into law. Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to working with you to enact these commonsense reforms that would greatly reduce catastrophic wildfire and improve forest health.

Sincerely,

Boone and Crockett Club
Farm Bureau
Federal Forest Resource Coalition
National Association of Conservation Districts
National Association of Counties
National Association of Forest Service Retirees
National Cattlemen’s Beef Association
National Forest County and Schools Coalition
National Shooting Sports Foundation
Partnership for Rural America
Public Lands Council
Safari Club International
Society for Range Management