July 16, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski  
Chairwoman  
Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

We write regarding proposals to modify the management of our National Forests. We appreciate that both of you understand the importance of this issue and wanted to formally communicate our priorities for any legislation aimed at improving the management of these forests. We believe that in order to succeed, legislation must increase the pace and scale of forest restoration, support local communities, improve recreational opportunities and conserves appropriate habitat.

Our National Forests face unprecedented threats from insects, disease, climate change and wildfires. These threats reach beyond the boundaries of our forests, as millions of Americans rely on clean water that originates in these landscapes. At the same time, Congress has failed to provide sufficient resources to adequately respond to these issues. In an attempt to address these and other challenges, Americans from various backgrounds continue to work together to resolve their differences and develop solutions to land management disputes. We should take note of this approach and work to mirror it in the U.S. Senate.

The best path forward will include, at a minimum, more active forest management, increased recreational opportunities and conservation designations. We cannot ignore the growing frustration with the current state of our National Forests and it would be unwise to think a one-sided approach will gain the necessary bipartisan support to be an effective legislative approach. Additionally, we must recognize regional differences in ecological conditions and local community needs. Any legislation should aim to improve the Forest Service’s interaction with industry and local communities in order to promote certainty and coordination regarding projects ranging from timber sales to infrastructure repairs to the maintenance of recreation sites.

Forest users expect and deserve a more locally-tailored approach to land management that leads to faster outcomes, whether we are looking to responsibly accelerate the pace and scale of commercial or restoration projects, protect unique landscapes or ensure recreational access. Too often, even consensus decisions are hampered by slow implementation. With these goals in mind, we believe forest management proposals should:
• Advance collaboratively-developed National Forest projects that increase the pace and scale of forest and watershed restoration;
• Adopt a landscape-scale approach to managing and conserving forests, including conservation designations ranging from Wild and Scenic Rivers to Wilderness;
• Safeguard the intent of bedrock environmental laws; and
• Ensure opportunities for public involvement in forest management.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. We appreciate the challenges you both face in working to improve the management of our National Forests and stand ready to work with you to craft bipartisan legislation that can be enacted this Congress.

Sincerely,

Jon Tester
United States Senator

Gary C. Peters
United States Senator

Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator

Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator

Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator