

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

January 5, 2016

The Honorable Tom Tidwell  
Chief  
U.S. Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue SW, Suite 1144  
Washington, DC 20250-0002

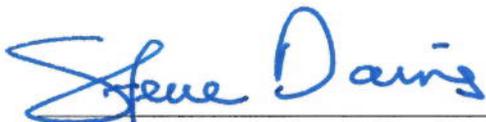
Dear Chief Tidwell:

As you determine the Administration's priorities for projects funded by the Land and Water Conservation Fund in Fiscal Year 2017 (FY 2017), we urge you to consider highly prioritizing the Whitefish Lake Watershed Project (also known as the Stillwater tract) proposed for the FY 2017 Forest Legacy Program by the State of Montana. We believe this project will enhance the critical natural, recreational, and economic resources of the greater Whitefish area. The State's FY 2017 request would secure a conservation easement over the first phase of the Stillwater tract, a key ownership totaling more than 15,000 acres. In turn, this rapidly growing region would have the capacity to sustain recreation resources, fish and wildlife habitat, renowned scenery, local water supply, and commercial timber for the future. The easement would complement easements secured over the last two years. Moreover, this continuation of the cooperative partnership between the Forest Service, the State, Plum Creek Timber, and the nonprofit Trust for Public Land, would secure the natural resource and working-forest benefits the Forest Legacy Program is designed to provide.

The proposed Whitefish Lake Watershed Project lies just west of the Trumbull Creek and Haskill Basin easements which were your agency's number one national priorities for Forest Legacy in FY 2015 and FY 2016. Plum Creek has effectively managed the natural and economic resources of these lands, providing timber to be milled locally, maintaining a crucial portion of the Whitefish Lake watershed, and allowing for much-valued public recreation. Adding these lands to the network of easement and fee protection would guarantee conservation and job-sustaining forest management of one of the largest contiguous blocks of private land in the entire Flathead Valley. In the process, it would offer a number of critical benefits to the region and all of Montana, such as protecting critical forestland, sustaining commercial timber operations, supporting jobs in the local communities, and securing permanent public access for the many recreationists who use these lands and meaningfully contribute to our state's outdoor economy. Moreover, some of the most significant habitat anywhere for grizzly bear, Canada Lynx, and bull trout as well as abundant deer, moose, mountain lion, grouse, turkey, and other game and fish for the area's many sportsmen would be conserved.

Forest Legacy Funding for the Stillwater tract in FY 2017 will keep this exceptional property in productive forestry, prevent the loss of forest resources, conserve extraordinary wildlife, scenic, and wetlands, and preserve coveted public access. Therefore, we ask that you give your fullest consideration and support to the request from the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks for the Whitefish Lake Watershed/Stillwater easement.

Sincerely,



STEVE DAINES  
Senator



RYAN ZINKE  
Member of Congress