

United States Senate

COMMITTEES
AGRICULTURE, NUTRITION AND
FORESTRY
APPROPRIATIONS
ENERGY AND NATURAL
RESOURCES
HOMELAND SECURITY AND
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
INDIAN AFFAIRS

May 24, 2018

Ms. Victoria Christiansen
Interim Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Interim Chief Christiansen:

I wish to congratulate you on your interim appointment as Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. I know that we share a strong commitment to forest health, local communities, and safety of those who live, work, and recreate in our National Forests. I look forward to working with you during your tenure as the head of the Forest Service.

As you are aware, the 2017 fire season was one of Montana's most devastating. With over 680,000 acres burned on the National Forests in Montana, we are left with a great deal of dead or dying timber, causing serious public safety risks. I urge immediate action on the National Forest System lands in the state impacted by last year's fire season.

As it is vital that the Forest Service ensure public safety and perform other important post-fire operations that will restore burned landscapes, I ask that you use all existing authorities to prioritize the NEPA analysis of these burned areas and grant an Emergency Situation Determination (ESD) wherever possible. Please know, I am committed to passing legislation providing any additional statutory flexibility to accomplish this work as quickly and as effectively as possible particularly as Congress considers the next Farm Bill.

As you know, existing Forest Service regulations allow for the Chief to authorize an ESD when hazards threaten human health and safety and avoiding a loss of commodity value (among other considerations). Many areas impacted by the 2017 fires are frequently visited by the public—during all seasons—therefore it is critical that these areas be treated expeditiously to ensure public use can safely resume in a timely manner. Furthermore, as the quality of wood products quickly deteriorates after a fire, it is appropriate that the agency make salvage operations a priority to ensure a project is economically feasible. The economic viability of wood products and Montana's mills are both critical components to ensuring these much needed projects can move forward, and prioritizing these efforts will provide benefits to both our forests and our forested communities.

Restoring these lands through forest management and harvesting the dead and dying trees will not only put many Montanans to work, but also keep timber mills operating, and provide meaningful results on the ground. Please put both the land and the people first in the prioritization of these lands.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Steve Daines". The signature is stylized, with the first name "Steve" written in a cursive-like script and the last name "Daines" in a more formal, slightly cursive script. The ink is a vibrant blue.

STEVE DAINES
United States Senator