

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

October 12, 2022

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary, Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 202500

Dear Secretary Vilsack,

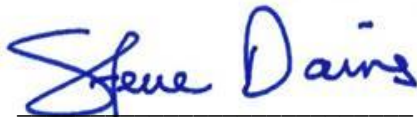
We write to ask that you do all in your power to follow through on your commitment to working with state and local governments to improve our forest health and address the wildfire crisis. By mid-summer, your Department was in receipt of \$160 million to award grants to States and Tribes for implementing projects under the Good Neighbor Authority (GNA), a time-tested mechanism for achieving this very outcome, but had not yet acted to allocate all of these funds. We urge you to establish a transparent process for distributing GNA funds directly to States and Tribes expeditiously and in a manner that maximizes taxpayers' return on investment.

Since 2014, 338 GNA agreements have been signed, leading to hundreds of thousands of acres of forest restoration work completed across 38 states. In acknowledgment of the success and furtherance of the bipartisan support of this authority, Congress appropriated unprecedented funding to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for GNA projects in the infrastructure law. Due to the nature of GNA agreements wherein states and tribes absorb much of the workload, projects are not hindered by workforce or housing shortages, overhead costs, or limited capacity meaning these funds are strategically positioned to be expeditiously deployed. However, despite promising rhetoric surrounding the urgent state of our forests, most of these funds have yet to be distributed. It is our understanding that the funds that have been allocated total less than six percent of the appropriated amount and were distributed without significant collaboration with state, local, or Tribal governments.

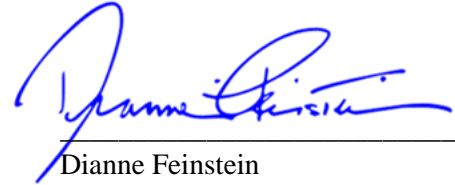
We believe that the distribution of GNA funds must be a transparent process that provides States and Tribes with an appropriate level of discretion regarding where and how GNA funds are utilized. Providing preference to those entities with an established, robust GNA program and a proven record of success, seeking out large-landscape, cross-boundary, and long-term GNA projects, and coordinating with and leveraging the resources and expertise of non-governmental partners will maximize the impact of GNA investments. Finally, the funds provided by the infrastructure law for GNA agreements should be seen as additive, not substitutionary, to the U.S. Forest Service's previous output and treatment targets. We encourage you to develop performance metrics to measure success and efficiencies realized under GNA with this in mind.

The delayed distribution of GNA funds has not come without consequences—states have now missed the window of opportunity to utilize these GNA funds to mitigate the risk and severity of the wildfires currently burning across the West. We cannot afford to miss the next window of opportunity. We again urge you to prioritize establishing a process to allocate GNA funds keeping in mind the considerations above. We look forward to continuing our partnership to improve forest conditions in the West and respond to the wildfire crisis plaguing our states.

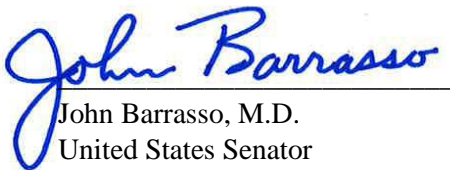
Sincerely,



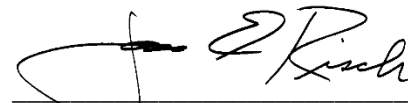
Steve Daines
United States Senator



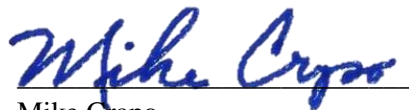
Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator



John Barrasso, M.D.
United States Senator



James E. Risch
United States Senator



Mike Crapo
United States Senator