

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 19, 2017

The Honorable Tony Tooke
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Chief Tooke:

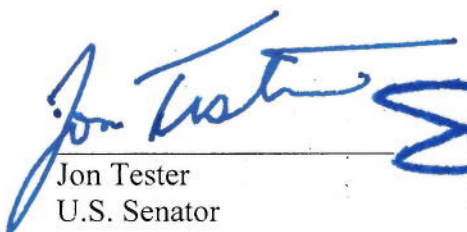
We are writing to advise you of our strong support for inclusion of the Kootenai Forestlands Project in your agency's Fiscal Year 2019 Forest Legacy Program priorities list. Similar to the Fiscal Year 2012 Stimson Forestland Conservation Project near Troy, Stimson and the state of Montana have agreed that a conservation easement on these 22,275 acres of private land would protect responsible timber harvest, critical wildlife habitat, and recreational public access. There is strong pressure for development in this area, and subdivisions and single-family homes are being built near the site. Obtaining a conservation easement for this site would protect these lands from development, and allow sustainable timber harvest to keep producing four million board feet of timber and \$5.25 million in economic activity each year, along with 20 full-time jobs.

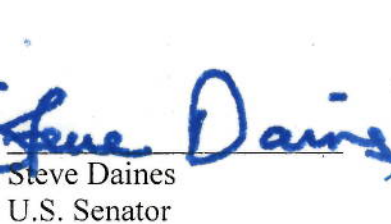
In addition to timber harvest, the terms of a conservation easement include protection for hunting, fishing, hiking, and other recreational access, as well as the scenic quality of the landscape. All but one of these parcels share a boundary with the Kootenai National Forest, and many are complete inholdings. A conservation easement will improve public access to federal and private lands, and support our state's \$7.1 billion outdoor recreation economy.

The Kootenai Forestlands Project will not only have significant economic benefits, but will also provide critical conservation gains for threatened and endangered species, including grizzly bears, Canadian lynx, and bull trout. An easement will increase habitat connectivity, while limiting development upstream from the town of Libby and the Lake Koocanusa Reservoir. Protecting these lands also means protecting our state's clean water, and the protected and game species that support our outdoor heritage.

For these reasons, we urge you to give careful consideration of the Kootenai Forestlands Project as you develop your priority rankings for Fiscal Year 2019 Forest Legacy Projects. We thank you for your attention, and your continued work to protect working landscapes.

Sincerely,


Jon Tester
U.S. Senator


Steve Daines
U.S. Senator


Greg Gianforte
U.S. Congressman