
November 21, 2017

Tony Tooke
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Chief Tooke:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), we are writing to congratulate you on your appointment to serve as the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service (USFS). We look forward to working with you in your capacity as the chief forestry officer of the United States and look forward to seeing you at WGA's Winter Meeting in Phoenix next month.

As you may be aware, WGA represents the Governors of 19 Western states and 3 territories in the Pacific Ocean. The association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information exchange and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

WGA is deeply interested in, and has adopted substantive and detailed policies regarding, the work of the USFS. The purpose of this communication is to formally introduce you to those policies and to encourage a close and productive working relationship between us.

We know you are already familiar with the work of the Western Governors' National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative, the signature initiative of our immediate past Chair, Governor Steve Bullock of Montana. Your predecessor, Chief Tom Tidwell, was an active participant in the initiative, and we have been pleased to have considerable intellectual and financial support from the USFS as the initiative has progressed. The initiative's June 2017 special report includes several administrative and legislative recommendations to improve state and federal land management practices. USFS personnel were instrumental in assembling these recommendations, and we urge your support of their implementation.

We would also like to discuss the collaborative engagement of the USFS on another issue of significant importance to Governors: the proposed rule to revamp the USFS public participation process ([80 FR 74740](#), November 30, 2015). Western Governors expressed concern about plans to eliminate the use of Administrative Procedures Act (APA) notice and comment procedures with respect to proposed changes to USFS manuals and handbooks. We appreciate USFS's willingness to work with Western Governors to design a process that addresses the agency's concerns about unnecessary delays in implementing non-controversial manual and handbook changes, while ensuring that states are aware of proposed changes to USFS policy. We hope that the final rule includes the provisions and processes USFS has discussed with WGA staff.

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Related to the proposed public participation rule, USFS personnel and WGA staff have also had discussions on ways to promote consultation with states in the rulemaking process. We are hopeful that these discussions will lead to USFS engaging states early in the consideration of new rules and other proposed policy changes, and produce agency efficiencies in considering and implementing new policies and rules.

Adopting a new, more efficient, and robust approach to how states and USFS work together is an important goal of Western Governors. As stated in WGA Policy Resolution [2017-01](#), *Building a Stronger State-Federal Relationship*, "Each executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide states with early, meaningful and substantive input in the development of regulatory policies." We submit that such consultation should commence immediately, both with respect to USFS policies under review and those under development.

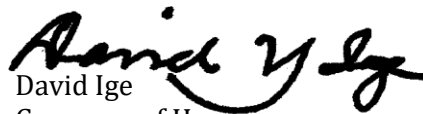
As you review and consider this information, please regard Western Governors as enthusiastic partners with respect to these and other issues. USFS lands constitute valuable resources in most western states, and their effective management is critical to the environmental and economic health of the region.

Congratulations again. We look forward to working with you to realign the state-federal relationship to better serve our common constituencies and to improve how states and federal agencies manage our western forests and rangelands, and look forward to discussing this and other matters in Phoenix.

Respectfully,



Dennis Daugaard
Governor of South Dakota
Chair, WGA



David Ige
Governor of Hawaii
Vice Chair, WGA