
November 24, 2020

The Honorable Jim Hubbard
Under Secretary for Natural Resources
and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

James Cason
Associate Deputy Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Under Secretary Hubbard and Associate Deputy Secretary Cason:

Western Governors appreciate your service as co-Chairs of the Wildland Fire Leadership Council (WFLC), an intergovernmental committee dedicated to the consistent implementation of wildland fire policies, goals, and management activities. WFLC's goals are to ensure effective and efficient wildfire management, promote fire-adapted communities and create resilient landscapes to achieve long-range benefits for society and nature. It also provides leadership and oversight for the implementation of the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, a national vision for wildland fire management in the United States.

Wildfire is an important and natural component of western landscapes. The presence of uncharacteristic wildfire on those landscapes, however, presents a significant threat to the public, communities and related infrastructure, timber resources, wildlife habitat, livestock forage, water quality and other values of our forest and prairie ecosystems. The increased presence of uncharacteristic wildfire is due to many complex variables, including past land management practices, the effects of climate and drought, and the proliferation of non-native invasive species. Similarly, the expansion of urban populations into the wildland urban interface affects the use of prescribed fire and other tools to reduce wildfire risk and puts additional pressure on wildland firefighters to save structures and reduce impacts on wildfire affected communities and increases the likelihood of human-caused ignitions.

We appreciate the difficult land management decisions faced by the U.S. Forest Service and Department of the Interior agencies. The Western Governors' *National Forest and Rangeland Management Initiative* examined many of the challenges confronted by land managers and focused a great deal of attention on the importance of restoration activities. Western Governors also understand that an effective emphasis on mitigation activities and the restoration of wildfire-affected ecosystems is critical to promoting long-term ecosystem resilience. This is a long-term endeavor, but it will reduce the reliance on suppression infrastructure, shift the focus to land management activities, and result in sustainable resilient ecosystems and safer communities. We encourage you to take steps to ensure that restoration activities receive the same management priority as mitigation and suppression work, especially when allocating funding to these activities.

Under the Shared Stewardship Memorandum of Understanding signed between the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Western Governors' Association (WGA) in December 2018, Western Governors have engaged with WFLC to improve interagency coordination in post-wildfire restoration work. Through your leadership, WFLC has proved an effective platform to bring together multiple federal agencies, states, Tribes, and local governments to discuss the challenges of restoration coordination and address the needs of wildfire affected communities.

The Honorable Jim Hubbard
James Cason
November 24, 2020
Page 2

One of the desired outcomes of this effort is a roadmap of assistance available to communities affected by wildfire and identification of “navigators” to help communities prioritize post-wildfire restoration projects based on local conditions and needs. There is also a need for greater integration of science and data into restoration decision making. Western Governors urge you to prioritize the funding of these important efforts, as they should have a positive effect on maximizing the value of restoration work and, more importantly, addressing the needs of communities affected by wildfire. An important immediate next step is finding an appropriate host for the roadmap that ensures the information is available and kept current with program requirements so communities have the resources they need.

Western Governors stand ready to work with you in addressing post-wildfire effects on local communities and ecosystems. We are also committed to shifting the focus from wildfire suppression to both short- and long-term activities that will produce safer, fire adapted communities and landscapes that are healthy and resilient.

Sincerely,



Kate Brown
Governor of Oregon
Chair, WGA



Brad Little
Governor of Idaho
Vice Chair, WGA