

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705
October 9, 2015

Mr. Thomas Tidwell, Chief
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington D.C. 20250-1111

Mr. Jason Weller, Chief
Natural Resources Conservation Services
1400 Independence Ave., Room 5105-A
Washington D.C. 20250

RE: FS-NRCS Joint Chief's Landscape Restoration Partnership Proposal Solicitation for FY 2016

Dear Chief Tidwell and Chief Weller:

I write in strong support of the application submitted by the United States Forest Service – Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF) and the Washington Natural Resource Conservation Service for their proposal: *Building Resilient Landscapes and Fire Adapted Communities in Washington State's East Cascades*. In the wake of Washington state's record breaking fire season, efforts must begin immediately to promote forest health and resident education in order to mitigate future disasters.

Washington state's forests are overdue for critical thinning and restoration activities that reduce hazardous fuels, improve habitat for wildlife, and protect water quality and quantity. OWNF seeks to advise, support, and help manage strategic fuel reduction and aquatic habitat restoration activities with willing private landowners adjacent to the OWNF. Without these efforts, communities and forests can expect the same fire behavior in coming fire seasons that we experienced this summer. This summer in Washington alone more than 850,000 acres burned in a few weeks.

Combatting this threat, the project will increase the scale of forest restoration within the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and nearby private lands to reduce the risk of future wildfires. Previously underserved communities and private landowners will be engaged in the "All Hands, All Lands" ethic to partner in restoration goals. Further, OWNF will pilot innovative approaches to NEPA planning to increase the pace at which on-the-ground projects are ready for implementation as funding becomes available. These actions will leverage the hiring of contractors to conduct landscape departure analyses, volunteers conducting road and stream surveys, and funds for road decommissioning committed by partners that prepare projects for action.

This resiliency effort is backed by key federal, state, and community stakeholders who serve as active partners, including the Washington Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Districts in Kittitas, Chelan, and Okanogan counties. This work builds on existing successes through the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative and Tapash Sustainable Forest Collaborative to engage new partners and develop effective means for managing forests across ownership boundaries.

I am proud of the work of our firefighters in this year's fire season but recognize that more needs to be done ahead of time. The plan put forth by the United States Forest Service – OWNF and the Washington Natural Resource Conservation Service is a step towards prevention. I ask for full and fair consideration of their application.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell
United States Senator

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