

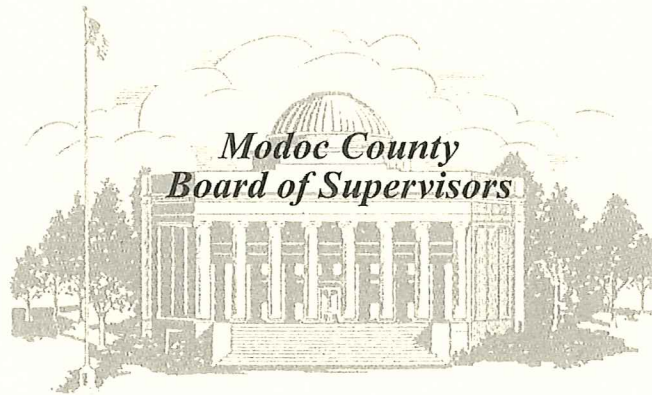
DAVID ALLAN
1st District

PATRICIA CULLINS
2nd District

KATHIE RHOADS
3rd District

ELIZABETH CAVASSO
4th District

GERI BYRNE
5th District



CHESTER ROBERTSON
CLERK OF THE
BOARD OF
SUPERVISORS

204 S. COURT STREET
ALTURAS, CALIFORNIA
96101

(530) 233-6201
FAX (530) 233-2434

November 8, 2017

Senator John Barrasso, Chairman
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
307 Dirksen Office Building
Washington DC 20510

RE: Support for S. 2068- The Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

The Modoc County Board of Supervisors (County) would like to go on record in support of your legislation S. 2068, the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017. Our National Forests desperately need active management to reduce catastrophic wildfires, curtail disease and insect infestations and to revitalize timber dependent communities. Modoc County is similar to other forested counties in that we have seen a drastic increase in all the negative measures of community health, both economic and culturally since the active management of our forests have been ignored.

Nearly 90,000 acres of the Modoc National Forest burned in July of this year. As in past years, when the fires hit properly treated areas, the fires decreased and control could be accomplished. Our forest has chosen to do essentially no salvage because of the time consuming, expensive and bureaucratic system that exists for applying the National Environmental Policy Act regulations to fire salvage. The same problems exist for preparing the planning documents for the needed forest health treatments that could reduce the increasing number of severe wildfires.

With the loss of Secure Rural Schools funding, our county is dependent on actual timber receipts to help fund our county school and road programs. It will take active management, such as is proposed in your legislation, to return county timber payments to the level necessary to sustain our county programs. We look forward to the day when, once again, active management of the National Forests is again benefitting the people and the environment of Northeastern California.

The County understands that your bill as written will:

- Statutorily reverse the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit's Cottonwood decisions by codifying the position taken by the Obama administration that federal

agencies are not required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at a programmatic level when new critical habitat is designated or a new species is listed;

- Direct the Department of Interior to create a categorical exclusion (CE) for certain sage grouse and mule deer habitat vegetation projects that address areas affected by the encroachment of invasive pinyon and juniper trees;
- Direct the Department of Agriculture to create a CE for immediate action in critical response situations due to disease and insect infestations, threats to watersheds and other high risk areas;
- Call for streamlined environmental review for ecosystem restoration projects by requiring the U.S. Forest Service to consider only two alternatives during the planning process: an “action” alternative and a “no action” alternative;
- Establish or modify CEs for wildlife habitat improvement, forest thinning and insect and disease infestations ; and
- Establish a five year pilot arbitration process to allow alternative dispute resolution for forest activities that will result in binding decisions not subject to judicial review.

The County recognizes that all the above issues will be beneficial to generating a return to active management on the Modoc National Forest. We appreciate your leadership on this critical issue. We are available to assist you in your efforts to pass this legislation and implement it on the landscape. Please count us as strong supporters of your bill.

Sincerely,



Geri Byrne
Chair, Modoc County Board of Supervisors