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Draft Support Letter for S.2068, the Wildfire Prevention and Mitigation Act of 2017

Dear Chairman Barrasso:

Iron County would like to go on record in support of your legislation, S. 2068, to actively manage our neglected National Forest lands in our county and across the country.

Our 25-year national experiment of limited to no National Forest management has failed miserably. In southern Utah where the Dixie National Forest was once vibrant and healthy, today is overgrown, diseased and in desperate need of attention. Earlier this summer portions of the Dixie, some (000,000 acres) burned out of control for six weeks and scorched the once beautiful forest lands of Garfield and Iron counties. The water supply of these counties was severely polluted and property damage was in the millions. All of this would have been prevented had your legislation been in place and the Forest Service empowered to actively manage the Dixie National Forest.

Many of our counties are very dependent on timber receipts and in the absence thereof, SRS payments to tide us over until active management is reinstated within the Forest Service and timber receipts return to their historic levels. We look forward to the day when our local economy is once again benefitting from forest management that prevents fires and provides healthy timber growth in our high desert areas of the west.

We understand 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 (DOI) 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 infestation; 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.

Thanks again for your leadership. We stand willing to assist you in your efforts in any way you deem appropriate. Please count us in as strong supporters of your bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dale Brinkerhoff". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Iron County