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PHONE 360.493.9231

TOLL FREE 800.562.8927

FAX 360.493.9247

September 6, 2013

Congressman Doc Hastings  
Chairman  
Natural Resources Committee  
United States House, Washington DC

Congressman Peter DeFazio  
Ranking Member  
Natural Resources Committee  
United States House, Washington DC

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio

I write to you expressing support for H.R. 1526 and intend to ask my Congressperson to support the bill when it comes to the floor for a vote. As an educator in a community where National Forests dominate the land base I am very aware that the current management approach is not acceptable. When such a large percentage of the land base is federal and not subject to taxation, job creation and retention is critical.

Today our Federal Forests are in many cases a burden to the taxpayers. Too often valuable Federal timber lands are neglected to the point where they are destroyed by bugs and insects. Or they are consumed by catastrophic wildfires that destroy everything in their path. Instead we need to adopt an approach that allows our Federal Forests to truly be multiple-use. This is clearly not the case now, and we are all paying for the lack of management.

Of particular concern to school districts are the areas where poorly managed federal forest lands join state-managed school trust lands. These areas allow for pest infestations and wildfires to spread onto school trust lands, without any recourse for the state beneficiaries of those lands, namely Washington's school children.

Our schools are responsible for providing the best possible education to our children. That is a real challenge when the Federal Forests in a district produce little to no timber sales, the mills close, and the family wage jobs that are vital to support of a community's tax base disappear. I am not suggesting that harvesting of timber is the only value of our Federal forest. However we can certainly have a sustainable harvest level that will provide the forest products industry with an adequate supply of timber to keep the mills open, and badly needed family wage jobs in our community. The current condition is providing virtually no employment opportunities, which has led to an unacceptable rate of unemployment, free and reduced lunches in our schools and a number of other social problems.

221 College Street NE  
Olympia, Washington 98516  
wssda.org

H.R 1526 makes common sense changes to current law that will allow for acceptable harvest levels and at the same time make our Federal Forests much safer for the recreation and wild life we all enjoy. We do appreciate the temporary extension of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act. It is important to the basic educational services we need to provide. However the real solution is a healthy Forest Products Industry that provides family wage jobs. These create a healthy tax base, which is the real solution to providing a quality education to our children.

Sincerely,

Anita Boyum

Chair, WSSDA Trust Land Task Force



PHONE 360.493.9231  
TOLL FREE 800.562.8927  
FAX 360.493.9247

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Olympia, Washington 98516  
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